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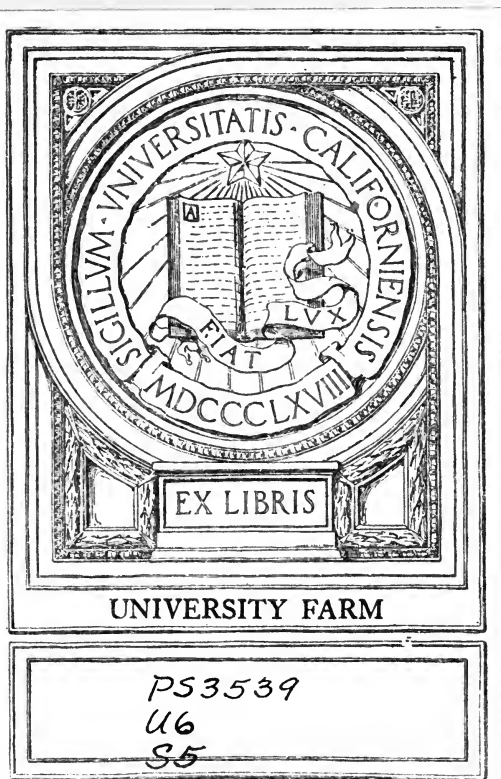


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# SIX SHORT PLAYS

BY WILBUR S. TUPPER

Gift of "Aggie Community Players".







SIX SHORT PLAYS



# SIX SHORT PLAYS

MR. FRASER'S FRIENDS        ::        IN TOSCANA TAVERN  
ONESIMUS    :: THE BARGAIN    :: FIGS AND THISTLES  
THE WISE MAN OF NINEVEH

BY  
WILBUR S. TUPPER



BOSTON  
THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY  
1922

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To

ANNABEL F. TUPPER



## FOREWORD

I HAVE read somewhere that there are but seven original stories in the world, and that all others are derived, directly or indirectly, from these seven. It has always been a matter of interest to me to know the origin of a drama, or how the idea prompting it arose. I am, therefore, addressing this foreword specially to such readers as share my interest in the matter of beginnings.

The germ of *In Toscana Tavern* is found in an Italian story of the eighteenth century, in which a typical Italian desperado and his son are involved. There are various versions of this old story in several tongues.

The ancient wisdom literature of the Hebrews tells of Ahikar, the Wise, cup-bearer and counselor to the King, and of his betrayal by his nephew. Variants of this simple story are found in Egyptian, Armenian, and other Oriental tongues. These manuscripts date anywhere from 500 to 1000 B. C., and may be much older. The references to Achiacharus, in the apocryphal book of Tobit (1-22; 14-10), undoubtedly refer to the Ahikar of our story. I have developed *The Wise Man of Nineveh* on the basis of these legends.

*The Bargain* recounts actual happenings. The events recorded in the play were personally known to the author. Some of the characters and many of the incidents have been transferred, without change, from life to paper. This is, therefore, a "realistic" play, in the true meaning of the word.

The theme of *Onesimus* should be known to all. As to the other plays in this volume, I know of nothing tending to connect them with the original seven stories of the world.

WILBUR S. TUPPER

San Leandro, California  
September, 1921



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MR. FRASER'S FRIENDS

A SATIRE

## CHARACTERS

- ✓ GEORGE FRASER, *an author.*
- ✓ ROBERT FRASER, *his younger brother.*
- ✓ MR. GROSBECK, *a banker.*
- ✓ MR. BANION, *a lawyer.*
- ✓ DR. MILBURN, *a physician.*
- MRS. WEBSTER, *a lodging house keeper.*

SCENE: *Mr. Fraser's apartment, early afternoon.*



# MR. FRASER'S FRIENDS

## A SATIRE

*A room, simply furnished. A large table in the center, covered with books, magazines, and writing material. There are a couple of easy chairs and several straight chairs. Fire-place in back and near it, a lounge. Pictures of famous authors on the walls. There is a door, right, leading to main hall of the house, and a door, left, leading to another room of the apartment. As curtain rises, GEORGE FRASER is walking about the room, with his hands in his pockets. ROBERT FRASER is sitting at the table, right.*

GEORGE. [*Stopping to address his brother.*] It's like this, Bob. That novel took a long time. I could have turned out a dozen short stories, since I began "The Rising Tide." Thank heaven! It's done at last.

ROBERT. Got it accepted yet?

GEORGE. No, but I've sent it in, and its fate is in the hands of the publishers. They've had it a month, and not a word from them. Oh, this waiting! Now the point is—no money coming in—nothing at all, except from book reviews in the Sunday Tribune. Meanwhile bills accumulate, and the rent is unpaid. Dear me, dear me!

ROBERT. Too bad you lost so much time.

GEORGE. [*Earnestly.*] I didn't lose any time. I don't regret the work on it. It's worth while, if I do

say it. It will be accepted too, and sweep the country.  
[*Sets himself at the table.*]

ROBERT. I hope so. [*Pause.*] Look here, George. I can help you out a bit.

GEORGE. No, Bob. Remember you have a wife to provide for.

ROBERT. Well, have you got a more loyal friend than Betty?

GEORGE. I know. Thank you for the offer, but I can't consider it.

ROBERT. Why wouldn't Uncle Mark help? He always liked you.

GEORGE. I thought of that. But he's peculiar. If I could explain personally—but I can't go to New York. No I must find a job for part time. But I'll need to be in better trim, before I do much anywhere.

ROBERT. How's the cold getting on? What did the doctor say?

GEORGE. He didn't come at all.

ROBERT. Didn't come! Shall I leave word again? I must go now, anyway. [*Rising.*]

GEORGE. No. I'm better today. But you may take this down to the Tribune office. [*Handing him manuscript.*] It must be in today. Ask if there are any books on hand for review, and bring them to me, at your convenience. You don't mind?

ROBERT. Glad to do it, of course.

GEORGE. Then I'll let you do one other thing. As you pass by the Empire Club, see if Banion is there. You know Banion, the lawyer? [*ROBERT nods assent.*] Tell him to stop a minute here, on his way to the office. Say if convenient, of course. [*ROBERT goes out right, and MRS. WEBSTER comes in at same door. She is a plain, large woman, typical of her class. She has letters and papers in her hand.*]

MRS. WEBSTER. Here's the mail, Mr. Fraser.

GEORGE. Thanks! [*He rises and takes mail. Looks eagerly at return address on each letter and throws them down, one after another, on the table. He notes that she is not inclined to go.*] Thank you very much, for bringing the mail, Mrs. Webster. [*He seats himself right of table, with his back toward her, and begins opening the letters. MRS. WEBSTER does not take the hint.*]

MRS. WEBSTER. Excuse me, Mr. Fraser, but I must speak about the rent that's past due.

GEORGE. [*Turning in his chair.*] What? Oh, yes, I am behind a week or two, temporarily.

MRS. WEBSTER. [*Impressively.*] Three weeks, next Monday, Mr. Fraser.

GEORGE. Is that so? Well, I'll make a payment before Monday.

MRS. WEBSTER. That's what you said last week.

GEORGE. Did I? Oh, yes! I remember. I was expecting some money, but it didn't come. But it will be all right, next Monday, never fear. [*He turns again to table. MRS. WEBSTER stands her ground.*]

MRS. WEBSTER. I want to ask you, Mr. Fraser, what you think about changing to the little room upstairs.

GEORGE. [*Turning again.*] Little room upstairs! I'm comfortable here. This is all right. Why change?

MRS. WEBSTER. It's cheaper, and if you find the rent here too high—

GEORGE. My dear Mrs. Webster, if going upstairs would get me out of the financial fog, I'd be willing to sleep on the roof. But I fail to see how the plan would help either of us.

MRS. WEBSTER. I'd rent this room to someone else, then. I've applicants waiting.

GEORGE. Oh, that's it. Um! [*Ominously.*] Look here, Mrs. Webster, don't be in a hurry to take in new lodgers. You might get a desperate criminal,—a burglar, who would clean out the place some night.

MRS. WEBSTER. I never took in a bad character in all the twenty-two years I've kept lodgers.

GEORGE. [*In a tone of surprise.*] Not one in twenty-two years! Then it's high time you had one. You know there are such people. They must have rooms somewhere. [*Confidently.*] You will get one, any time, now.

MRS. WEBSTER. [*Softening.*] Well, can I depend on that payment by Monday?

GEORGE. [*Emphatically.*] You certainly can, Mrs. Webster. Before then, I hope. [*MRS. WEBSTER goes out right.*] Whew! That's settled for the time being, but it will take a diplomat to meet the issue Monday. [*Picking up letters.*] Bills, bills, and more bills! If they accept "The Rising Tide," I'm all right. But I'll be swamped by the rising tide of debts, unless something happens soon. [*Knock at door right.*] Come in! [*MR. GROSBECK enters. He is a portly, well-dressed business man of fifty-five, slightly gray. GEORGE rises to greet him.*] Glad to see you, Mr. Grosbeck. Take a chair, please. [*Both sit, GROSBECK at right of table, GEORGE left.*]

GROSBECK. I just dropped in for a minute. I've been thinking over the matter you spoke to me about the other day.

GEORGE. [*Interested.*] That's very kind of you.

GROSBECK. I've been turning it over in my mind, and I think I have found something that will just suit you.

GEORGE. I must say it's generous of you, with all your business cares, to take time to help me. I certainly appreciate it.

GROSBECK. [*Magnanimously.*] Oh, I'm willing to help any deserving chap, glad to go out of my way to do it. Ever hear of the Golden Garden mining properties?

GEORGE. No.

GROSBECK. Well, myself and four associates own practically all the stock. It is in one of the richest sections of the Rainbow district. We are putting ten millions of the stock on the market—dollar shares, you know. It's a big thing, Fraser.

GEORGE. But how does that open a door for me?

GROSBECK. Just a minute. We've got agents out by the dozens, selling to farmers, mechanics, and the laboring classes. Now we want a high-grade man to place the stock with the better classes—business and professional men, right here in the city.

GEORGE. I'm afraid I'm not adapted—

GROSBECK. Oh, yes, you are. Wait till you meet our manager, and hear the selling talk. You will have our engineer's report, and it's a clincher. Then there's the report of other experts. You will find it all in the prospectus. [*Hands GEORGE a folder.*]

GEORGE. [*Looking at the prospectus.*] I don't see your name here.

GROSBECK. Oh, my name doesn't appear. I have a man who acts for me as director and treasurer.

GEORGE. Acts for you?

GROSBECK. Yes, votes as I tell him. You know a banker has to be conservative. People look to him for advice in financial affairs. So to be unprejudiced, we don't act as managers or directors of other concerns. But merely owning stock—that doesn't matter.

GEORGE. [*Vaguely.*] I see—

GROSBECK. Aside from other things, there's an advantage in my name not appearing. You might refer a prospective buyer to me, and I could remark, casually, that I owned stock, and say what I thought about it. See? It's a money maker, Fraser, and you need the money.

GEORGE. I need the money, sure enough. I don't mind telling you—I want to ask—

GROSBECK. What is it? Go ahead!

GEORGE. I've just finished a big work, a four-hundred page novel. It took most of my time for months, and—well, it's left me hard up, for the time being. Do you think I could get a little loan—say a hundred dollars—at your bank to tide me over? For security—

GROSBECK. Don't ask, just now, Fraser. You are not a depositor with us, and we have to hew to the line, don't

you see. [*Suggestively.*] What about Marcus Fraser, your rich old uncle? Ever hear from him?

GEORGE. [*Taking the hint.*] I couldn't take this matter up with my uncle, under the circumstances.

GROSBECK. He's a plunger, all right, and always bets on the winning side. But you take this offer, Fraser, and you won't need to ask anyone for money. [GEORGE *makes a gesture of dissent.*] Now don't decide till you know the terms. Suppose we make you a guaranty of twenty-five dollars a week? Ready money, you see. I'm going to the company's office now. [GROSBECK *rises.* GEORGE *rises, too.*] I'll be back in half an hour, with an offer in black and white. Goodbye. [*He goes out right.*]

GEORGE. Goodbye. [*He walks about the room.*] Twenty-five dollars a week! That would be a life saver right now. But I can't. I simply can't. Well, I must pull myself together, and settle down to pot boiler work again. [*Arranges his writing material, and begins to write. Stops and changes the pen. Then throws it down, rises and walks about room. Knock at door right.*] Now who's that? Come in! [*Enter BANION, a typical young professional man, well-dressed and prosperous looking.*]

BANION. Hello, Fraser! Your brother said you wanted to see me.

GEORGE. Yes, sit down. [BANION *sits down right of table, GEORGE left.*] I won't keep you long. To get right to the point, I want to push that claim against the Stoddard Company. There's \$400 still due me, you know.

BANION. I see, I see. Want to start suit against them, eh?

GEORGE. Yes, anything to get the money. You know the facts. We can win, can't we?

BANION. Let me see. As a legal proposition, it's very simple. [*With impressive ostentation.*] Their action was clearly ultra vires. Now that raises the question of estoppel. As to the condition of the property, your state-

ments were clearly representations, and not warranties. The doctrine of caveat emptor holds them there. That's plain, isn't it?

GEORGE. [*Hopefully.*] Then you think we can make 'em pay up?

BANION. Hold on! I didn't say that. I was speaking solely of the legal aspect of the case.

GEORGE. [*Subdued.*] Oh!

BANION. Now as to the facts. You must substantiate your allegations by qualified witnesses, and by evidence that is competent, relevant, and material. If you can't do this, you lose your case. If you prove your case—well, then, you never know what a jury will do.

GEORGE. We've got a chance, anyway. When could I get the money, if we win?

BANION. [*Calculating.*] If we start now, we can get on the fall calendar, and try the case some time next winter, by spring, at least. Let's see. After verdict, motion for new trial. Motion denied, and appeal to Appellate Court. That will be a year more. Appellate Court is two years behind with its work. Judgment affirmed there, and appeal to the Supreme Court. Supreme Court is three years behind with its calendar. Oh, say eight or nine years.

GEORGE. So long!

BANION. That is, providing everything goes well, and there are no dilatory tactics. A reversal in the upper court would mean three to five years more.

GEORGE. [*Grimly.*] Something like the Thirty Years' War, or the Crusades. Well, let's sue 'em. I'm a young man yet, and they may settle.

BANION. It's up to you. But you understand it will cost something to start proceedings.

GEORGE. How much?

BANION. Disbursements will be thirty dollars or more. And there's the retainer. Oh, say one hundred fifty dollars, in all.

GEORGE. [*In dismay.*] That much! In advance?

BANION. Well, we must steer clear of champerty and maintenance. And it wouldn't be professional ethics to waive the retainer fee.

GEORGE. [*Dejectedly.*] I'll have to let the matter drop, then.

BANION. [*Rising.*] Sorry! I'd like to help you, Fraser. Well, I must be off. I've an important engagement, right on now. [*Knock at door right.*]

GEORGE. Come! [*DR. MILBURN hurries in. He is a professional man of about the same age and general type as BANION. He carries a medicine case in his hand.*] Glad to see you, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Ah, Fraser! Beg pardon for being late. Couldn't make it yesterday. Awfully busy! [*To BANION.*] Don't go for a minute, Banion, and I'll go with you. [*BANION seats himself on lounge, and during conversation between GEORGE and the DOCTOR, busies himself with a magazine. Meanwhile the DOCTOR has seated himself by GEORGE, and is feeling his pulse.*] Hold out your tongue! [*GEORGE complies. The DOCTOR, with an important air, takes out a thermometer.*] We'll try this, too. It's a ten-second one—only kind possible with the women. [*Pause.*] Well, hm! Well, you evidently have a mild hepatic derangement, hepato-enteric, or hepato-gastric, complicated with neurasthenia.

GEORGE. What's that, Doctor?

DOCTOR. [*Inspecting the thermometer.*] Slight pyrexia, due to temporary coryza.

GEORGE. Have I got that, too? Well, fix me up. I must keep at work.

DOCTOR. Hm! [*Pause.*] Who is your family doctor, Fraser?

GEORGE. I don't know. Haven't had a doctor since the auto smash-up.

DOCTOR. Who took care of you then?

GEORGE. They called Doctor Baker. He was the nearest.

DOCTOR. Then he's your family physician.



GEORGE. But that was two years ago.

DOCTOR. That doesn't matter. You haven't called anyone since. [*Emphatically.*] Professionally considered, he's your family physician. Now I mustn't do anything that looks like getting Dr. Baker's patients away from him.

GEORGE. But Doctor—

DOCTOR. You see if I didn't know he was your physician, it would be different. But I do know it. Oh, no, it wouldn't be professional courtesy.

GEORGE. I was about to say—

DOCTOR. I'd like to take your case, Fraser, and the fact that I'm rushed to death wouldn't stand in the way, not a bit. But I mustn't lower our ethical standards.

GEORGE. Of course, Doctor. You know.

DOCTOR. Say, how about Culver, the new man at the County Hospital? See him. He's all right, they say. But don't tell him I sent you. [*Emphatically.*] Really, you don't need anyone. Keep your fingers out of the ink pot, and stick your nose out of doors, occasionally, and you will be all right. [*He rises. BANION rises also. Enter GROSBECK and ROBERT, right. The latter has a book under his arm, which he puts on the table. GEORGE rises as they enter.*]

GROSBECK. Hello, boys! What's up? Private conference?

BANION. Oh, it's nothing. We're going now.

MRS. WEBSTER. [*Entering with telegram.*] A telegram for you, Mr. Fraser. [*Mrs. Webster goes out, right.*]

GEORGE. Oh! The publishing company at last! [*Opens and reads message.*] What! What's this? My Uncle Mark! Uncle Mark dead! [*All start.*]

THE OTHERS. What? No!

GEORGE. Listen. [*Reads.*] "Marcus Fraser found dead in his office. You are sole heir under will. Advise you come to New York. Wire answer. Haldane and Anderson, Attorneys."

[*General excitement. All crowd around GEORGE,*

*beaming with enthusiasm, and shake his hand, as they voice their congratulations.]*

GROSBECK. Good, good! A thousand congratulations!

BANION. Mine, too. Heartfelt good wishes. Shake!

DOCTOR. Well, well! I'm so glad. Put it there!

ROBERT. George, you know how I feel.

GEORGE. Thank you all. I don't know what to say. I can't realize it. [*He drops into a chair bewildered by the news.* GROSBECK, BANION, and the DOCTOR shake hands with him again, and pat him on the back. MRS. WEBSTER'S face can be seen occasionally, at the door.]

DOCTOR. What's the estate worth?

GROSBECK. More than a million! He was rated at a million some time ago.

BANION. Well, George, how does it seem to be a millionaire?

DOCTOR. More than a million! Think of it! Let us all go over to the Empire Club, where we can celebrate properly, and drink our friend's good health.

GEORGE. No, thank you. I'd rather not go anywhere today. I'm a bit flustered.

MRS. WEBSTER. [*Entering.*] Oh, Mr. Fraser, let me serve something here in your room. There's cake and coffee that I just got ready for the Ladies' Aid Bazaar, this afternoon. It won't take a minute.

GEORGE. Thank you, Mrs. Webster. You are very kind, but we mustn't appropriate the ladies' refreshments.

MRS. WEBSTER. [*Pleading.*] Oh, let me! You have been with me so long, and I always wanted to do something for you. Please let me do this!

GEORGE. All right, then. [*Rising.*] We will accept your hospitality, Mrs. Webster, and thank you very much. Bob, will you clear the table, please? [*ROBERT begins to gather up books, etc., from the table, putting them through door left.*]

MRS. WEBSTER. [*To GEORGE, front center, in doleful voice.*] I know, Mr. Fraser, you won't be staying long in my poor house. I'm so sorry to lose you. [*Almost*

tearfully.] I don't know how I will find a lodger to take your place.

GEORGE. Don't worry, Mrs. Webster. I'll see that the rent is paid on this room, until you do get a new lodger.

MRS. WEBSTER. [*Brightening.*] Thank you, sir, but I'll never get another like you. [*She quickly puts cloth on table, and brings in coffee and cake.*]

GEORGE. Well, gentlemen, we'll celebrate here—that is, if you have the time.

DOCTOR. [*Emphatically.*] We'll take the time.

BANION. [*Similarly.*] Business can wait.

GEORGE. Compared with the Empire Club, it will be a modest spread.

DOCTOR. [*Unctuously.*] It's not the refreshment. It's the fellowship.

GEORGE. Come on. Be seated, please. [*They all sit at table. GEORGE is on side facing the audience. GROSBECK and ROBERT are on his right, GROSBECK nearest to GEORGE. BANION and the DOCTOR are on the left. MRS. WEBSTER serves them, beginning with GEORGE.*]

BANION. You struck the right chord, Doctor, when you said fellowship.

GROSBECK. [*Rising and clearing his throat.*] Gentlemen, I'm no speech maker, but I want to say a word about our friend and his good fortune. I have known George longer than any of you. He was in my Sunday School class, and I have seen him grow up, and watched him apply in professional and private life those lessons we learned together from the Good Book. I want to propose a toast to friendship—it's a line from Shakespeare, "He was my friend, faithful and just to me." [*All but GEORGE stand and drink.*]

ALL BUT GEORGE. Hear, hear! [*All sit but BANION.*]

BANION. I can't tell you how glad I am to be one of the first to congratulate George. He and I grew up together. What I have most admired about George is his loyalty to his friends, through thick and thin. I know that George, as a millionaire, will not forget the

friends of his more modest days. This thought suggests the words of Confucius: "Faithfulness and sincerity are the highest things." [*All but GEORGE stand and drink.*]

ALL BUT GEORGE. Hear, hear! [*All sit down but DOCTOR.*]

DOCTOR. I want to add a tribute to our friend that you gentlemen have not expressed. George Fraser, as novelist and literary critic, has attained distinction in the world of letters, and has brought fame to our city. I have prided myself on his friendship, since I came to this place ten years ago. I am slow to make friends, and slower to change them. So I am prompted to give you this quotation as my toast to friendship: "An old friend can never be found, and nature has provided that he cannot easily be lost." [*All but GEORGE stand and drink.*]

ALL BUT GEORGE. Hear, hear! [*All sit down.*]

BANION. Now we want to hear from George. [*GEORGE hesitates.*]

GROSBECK. Come on, George! Tell us what's in your heart.

GEORGE. [*Rising.*] I couldn't do that, Mr. Grosbeck. But I don't want you, gentlemen, to think me unappreciative. [*Cries of "No! no!"*] I simply cannot express my feelings. It is all so sudden, so strange, that it confuses me a bit. A poor man at one o'clock, and a millionaire at two! [*Cries of "Hear! hear!"*] It seems like a dream, and that I might wake up with a start. [*Cries of "No! no!"*] I don't realize the situation yet. It will take time to get my bearings. Thank you very much. [*He sits down. Cries of "Good!" "Hear, hear!" and "That's the talk," from GROSBECK, BANION, and DOCTOR.*]

GROSBECK. Fine, fine, George. I am proud of you.

GEORGE. [*Starting up.*] The telegram! I'm forgetting the telegram. It called for an answer. I'll wire that I'll go on to New York. [*Starting toward door.*] Excuse me, please. I'll be back in two minutes. Do the honors, Bob, in my absence. [*He goes out right.*]

BANION. Pretty soft for you, Robert, with a millionaire brother, and he a bachelor, too. You should worry.

ROBERT. Oh, I've always made my own way, and I can do so in the future.

GROSBECK. How would you like to try banking, Robert, if we can find a berth for you.

ROBERT. Never had experience along that line. I might look into it. Thank you, Mr. Grosbeck.

DOCTOR. I'm going to propose George for the Empire Club.

BANION. Better let me do it. I've known him much longer, and you are new in the Club.

DOCTOR. [*Angrily.*] Don't crab my idea! Do you want to monopolize him?

GROSBECK. See here, boys! Don't quarrel over the matter. There's nothing to prevent all of our names going on his application.

BANION. I suppose he ought to join the Chamber of Commerce, too. What do you think?

DOCTOR. [*Disparagingly.*] Oh, it will do for anyone who can't get into the Empire. Not at all select. Small tradesmen—Tom, Dick, and Harry—every barber, tailor, and piano mover that can raise twenty dollars a year. All right, if you want to run for office. [*Pause.*]

ROBERT. Wasn't it strange that Uncle Mark should be found dead in his office?

DOCTOR. Not at all. Some heart trouble, or apoplexy—the nervous strain of big business, you know. [*Enter GEORGE and takes his place at table.*]

GEORGE. Well, the answer is on its way. I shall be glad to visit New York. I can see the publishers, too, about my book.

DOCTOR. You can leave that work now to the fellows that have to do it.

GEORGE. I don't feel that way about my new book. [*Earnestly.*] But I am glad I don't have to be a literary hack. [*To BANION.*] How long should it be, before I get returns from the estate?

BANION. Not long—only one heir. By the way, George, I will look after the legal matters for you. Not a word, now. You must let me do it—as your friend, you know. I want to be of help in your getting that fortune.

GEORGE. Oh, thank you.

GROSBECK. Meanwhile, if you need funds, just drop your I. O. U. in our bank for a couple of thousand, or as much as you need.

GEORGE. Thank you very much.

DOCTOR. I don't like the idea of your going to New York alone, in your present subnormal condition. I am going to plan to make the trip with you, and look after you on the way. I am acquainted there, and could stay a few days to see that you meet the right people.

GEORGE. You are very kind.

MRS. WEBSTER. [*Entering.*] Here's another telegram, Mr. Fraser.

GEORGE. Thank you. Now who is this one from? [*She hands him the message and goes out, holding the door ajar. GEORGE opens the telegram. A look of blank amazement comes to his face. He drops his head on his hands, his elbows on the table.*]

GROSBECK. No bad news, I hope.

GEORGE. [*Handing him message.*] Read it!

GROSBECK. [*Reading aloud.*] "Your uncle committed suicide. Estate insolvent. May we draw on you for funeral expenses. Haldane and Anderson." [*Long pause. GEORGE continues with his head in his hands. ROBERT tries to look brave. GROSBECK, BANION, and the DOCTOR are visibly embarrassed. The sudden news does not dull MRS. WEBSTER's sense of thrift. She snatches the coffee-pot and cake from the table, and bears them haughtily out of the room.*]

ROBERT. Uncle Mark a suicide! I can't believe it.

GROSBECK. [*In an unfeeling tone.*] Old Marcus evidently bet once on the losing side.

DOCTOR. My word, but that is a jolt!

GEORGE. [*Looking up.*] A literary hack, again!

BANION. [*Looking at his watch, and affecting surprise.*] Great Caesar! Three o'clock! I've had a client waiting for half an hour.

DOCTOR. Three o'clock? You don't say. My office hours start at three. [*Both get up and go quietly back of table to door, right.* GEORGE, *with head buried in his hands, does not notice them.* They tiptoe out, closing door softly.]

GROSBECK. [*Briskly.*] Well, we all get hit sometimes. You must buck up, Fraser. Be philosophic! [*Impressively.*] Remember, you can't lose what you never had. See here. I've got that proposition in shape. [*Pulls out a paper.*] Thirty per cent. straight, and a guaranty of twenty-five a week. What do you say?

GEORGE. [*Without looking up.*] I don't want to talk about it today.

GROSBECK. Don't be stubborn, Fraser! It's got to be yes or no today. If you don't want it, there are others.

GEORGE. [*As before.*] Give it to someone else. I don't want it.

GROSBECK. All right. That settles it for you. [*Goes out right without a word.*]

ROBERT. [*Moving into chair vacated by GROSBECK, and putting his hand on his brother's shoulder.*] Don't take it so hard, George.

MRS. WEBSTER. [*Entering.*] I'm going to ask you to get your things out by Monday, Mr. Fraser.

ROBERT. [*Turning.*] Here! I'll take care of that. How much is it?

GEORGE. [*With a gesture of repression.*] No, you don't! [*Rising, speaks with polite irony to MRS. WEBSTER.*] I shall be delighted, Mrs. Webster, to vacate the apartment, by Monday. Really, I'm hoping to get out before.

MRS. WEBSTER. And I want what's owing me before you go. And there's a dollar extra—coffee and cake for five.

GEORGE. [*As before.*] Quite right, Mrs. Webster, and well worth it. I must say that you make excellent cake. [*She gives him a look of mingled wonder and anger, and goes out, slamming the door.*]

GEORGE. [*Cheerily.*] Well, Bob, when can you and Betty be ready to start for New York?

ROBERT. New York? What do you mean?

GEORGE. I mean that we are going to have the time of our lives, while I am looking after the estate.

ROBERT. But the estate is gone—bankrupt—the telegram!

GEORGE. Fiction, Bob! Just a bit of fiction, to put them to the proof. It was the acid test.

ROBERT. [*Springing to his feet.*] Then you haven't lost the fortune?

GEORGE. [*Smiling knowingly.*] I haven't lost anything, except my friends. And, as Grosbeck says, you can't lose what you never had. [CURTAIN.]



IN TOSCANA TAVERN

A TRAGEDY

## CHARACTERS

*2nd* MARTA, proprietor of Toscana Tavern

*above* ANTONIO, neighbor of Marta.

*middle* ELENA, daughter of Antonio.

*inside* MARIO, the stranger.

*The action takes place between eleven and twelve o'clock,  
Saturday night, in the foreign quarter of New York City.*

*TIME: the present.*

# IN TOSCANA TAVERN

## A TRAGEDY

*The curtain rises, disclosing a room used both as office and dining room. There is a door at the back, leading into the main dining room, a door, right, leading to street, and a door, left. There is a table in the middle of the room, with lamp on it, four dining chairs and two easy chairs. There is a sideboard at left of door, back. Conventional dining room pictures are on the walls.*

MARTA sits at the table, with a ledger before her. There are bills, accounts, etc., on the table. She appears to be a woman of about fifty-five, with black eyes and gray hair. She is plainly dressed. Her care-lined face and round shoulders tell of life's hard struggle. Her expression is one of bitterness and suspicion. She busies herself a moment, making entries in the ledger. A knock at door, right.

MARTA. Come in!

[Enter ANTONIO. He is a man of sixty, poorly but neatly dressed. He is a slight, mild mannered man, with gentle brown eyes, and thin gray hair. He has a small package in his hand.]

ANTONIO. Good evening, Marta. Here I am again, and you still at the bills. I must be early.

MARTA. Never mind. I'm done now. Sit down.

ANTONIO. [*Offering her the package.*] Here's a birthday gift for tomorrow, Marta. Just a trifle. But you mustn't open it until morning.

MARTA. [*Harshly.*] Don't remind me! [*She notes his disappointed look, and adds, more kindly, taking the package.*] Thank you, just the same, Antonio. Will you have a glass of wine?

ANTONIO. [*Sitting down, left of table.*] No, thank you, Marta.

MARTA. We will have coffee, then. Elena won't be ready until nearly twelve.

ANTONIO. Thanks. I don't mind the coffee, if it's no trouble.

MARTA. None at all. I have it every night. A bit to eat with it?

ANTONIO. Oh, no, thanks. Just the coffee. [*MARTA goes out door, back, and returns in a moment carrying a tray.*]

MARTA. All ready now, in just a minute. [*She puts tray on sideboard, places coffee pot, cups, etc., on table, and serves the coffee, then sits at table, facing audience.*]

ANTONIO. [*Sipping the coffee.*] Ah! That's fine. Everyone says there's no coffee such as you get in Toscana Tavern. You've made a great success of this place, Marta, since—since you've had it alone.

MARTA. Since Pietro left me, you mean. Say it out!

ANTONIO. [*Apologetically.*] I didn't mean that, Marta. God knows I didn't. A friend that's known you all your life wouldn't say anything to hurt you.

MARTA. Oh, it's not what you say. It's what I feel. It's the life I've had to live, these eleven years. Work, work, and save! And the place not paid for yet! But he will never trouble me again. He's dead at last.

ANTONIO. Good Lord! How? When?

MARTA. [*Shrugging.*] I only know what old Nori told me—in Chicago—some fever, he said.

ANTONIO. [*Moved.*] Pietro Morselli dead! Poor

Pietro! He had his faults, Marta. We all have faults. But we must think kindly of him now.

MARTA. [*Coldly.*] I hate him the same as ever.

ANTONIO. Marta, Marta! God forgive you for speaking that way of Pietro, now he's dead.

MARTA. [*Bitterly.*] Don't talk God to me! What has God done for me? Didn't I work every day, early and late, since we came to America? Didn't I wash dishes in the places where Pietro worked as waiter? We couldn't speak the language, and they paid us little enough, God knows! And when my baby was born, I had to take him into the kitchen with me. It was seven years before we could get a place of our own—a poor one, at that. "Work hard," Pietro would say. "We will be rich some time." Six years later we got this place. I wish I had died first! It was then I took that girl in, off the streets, so she could make an honest living. I believed in God, then,—in your God, Antonio. [*She rises in her excitement.*] And Pietro lost his head, and ran away with her, and took the money we had saved up toward buying the place—[*With rising passion.*] took the money, Antonio,—do you hear? the money!

ANTONIO. [*Rising, and speaking soothingly.*] Don't Marta! Don't think of those things now.

MARTA. [*With increasing bitterness.*] God did more! The boy, Antonio! You know how he stayed out on the streets, looking for his father till midnight, and I afraid he was stolen! I whipped him, and put him to bed. Next day he ran away!

ANTONIO. But Marta—

MARTA. Everything went—the man, the boy, the money! Let them go!

ANTONIO. [*Earnestly.*] Marta, whatever happens, never lose faith in God.

MARTA. [*Cynically.*] Oh, I trust God, Antonio, but not your God. [*Resuming her seat and tapping the ledger.*] See here, Antonio, I made money this week. That is the God I trust.

ANTONIO. [*Dropping into his chair.*] Marta! Marta!

MARTA. I am right. Listen. I remember what Father Petrello said once: "God will take care of you, Marta. Only trust God." Those were his very words, Antonio. And it's money that takes care of me. If I were a day late with my payment, do you think old Mecchi would take beads or prayers? Bah! It's money they all want—money, money!

ANTONIO. [*In a conciliatory tone.*] Of course, in business, you know. [*Breaking off.*] Come now—don't be so unhappy. Besides, I've something to tell you. It's about Elena. How long has she been with you, Marta?

MARTA. [*Indifferently.*] You know as well as I.

ANTONIO. To be sure, to be sure. Well, I'm thinking—only thinking, you know—of having her leave the restaurant, for a time at least.

MARTA. What is it? More pay somewhere else?

ANTONIO. Oh, no, no! It's not that at all. You see the poor girl hasn't had much education. I want her to go to the Sisters' School, and take piano lessons, too, if we can afford it. She has no time for such things now, and since her mother died, it's harder on her than ever. The young children need her, and I am in the shop all day.

MARTA. [*Coldly.*] Well, does she want to go?

ANTONIO. No, that is just it. She's so fond of you—calls you "Aunt Marta," just as though you were her own kin. You must urge her to leave, Marta, for her own good, you know.

MARTA. You will spoil the girl, Antonio, with books and music lessons. She will make no better marriage for all that. And you can't afford it either,—now, can you?

ANTONIO. No, not really. But we could manage some way.

MARTA. Beppe Rosani would take her now, and he has money.

ANTONIO. But Elena doesn't want him.

MARTA. [*Scornfully.*] So you let her choose! The

girl knows more than the father, eh? Had I married the man my father picked out, I would be a rich man's wife now. But I ran away with the worthless Pietro, and came to America.

[Enter ELENA. *She is a handsome girl of twenty-one, with black hair, brown eyes, and good color. She wears a neat waitress' apron over a black dress.*]

ELENA. A gentleman wants to see you, Aunt Marta. He wants to know if you can give him a room for the night.

MARTA. [Rising.] We don't keep lodgers. Who is he?

ELENA. He says he's a stranger, just in on the boat from Galveston, and it's late now to look for lodgings, and he's willing to pay well.

MARTA. Such talk comes from the ones who go away without paying at all.

ELENA. I wish you would see him. He specially asked if Marta Morselli kept the place, and could he see her.

MARTA. Well, there's the spare room, if he is willing to pay. Show him in, Elena. [ELENA goes out rear.] Now why should a stranger be coming here, Antonio, at this time of night?

ANTONIO. Toscana Tavern is well thought of, Marta—didn't I tell you?

[Enter ELENA and MARIO. *He is a young man of twenty-four, with black eyes, black, curly hair and mustache. He is well dressed.*]

MARTA. You want to see me? What will the gentleman have?

MARIO. Supper first, and I want you to keep me for the night—perhaps longer.

MARTA. You can have a bed, and it's our best. Our special Saturday night dinner is now being served. Our guests say it is good.

MARIO. I am sure it is very good. Where shall I eat?

MARTA. In the main dining room, or here, if the gentleman prefers.

MARIO. I'll stay here, then. [MARTA places a chair at the table. She reaches for the lamp. MARIO steps forward.] Let me help you, please. [She resents the proffered help, showing irritation, and puts the lamp on the sideboard. ELENA spreads a fresh cloth on table, meanwhile watching MARIO closely.]

MARTA. [Significantly.] The gentleman was sent here, perhaps, by some friend?

MARIO. No, I am a stranger. [Divining her meaning.] But I will pay in advance. Will you change this bill, please? [Takes out a large roll, and hands MARTA a fifty dollar bill.] *Elena*

MARTA. [Taking the bill.] Diablo! Have I so much change in the house? [She examines the bill critically, rubbing it in her fingers. She goes out, rear, followed by ELENA. MARIO takes seat at table, facing audience.]

MARIO. [To ANTONIO.] Well, my friend, are you one of the force here?

ANTONIO. Oh, no. I'm only waiting here for my daughter.

MARIO. You live near?

ANTONIO. Yes.

MARIO. Just two doors up the street, isn't it—opposite the engine house?

ANTONIO. [In wonder.] Yes, but how did you—

MARIO. I was sure of it. You are Antonio Rizzi, the shoemaker. [Rising.] And I am Mario, the boy who ran away, eleven years ago.

ANTONIO. [Springing up.] Mother of God!

MARIO. Sh! Not a word to my mother, yet. I plan to surprise her tomorrow.

ANTONIO. Mario! Mario come back again! I can scarce believe it. Oh! this will change Marta's life. Tell me about it, Mario, before she comes in again. You have prospered?

MARIO. [Boastfully.] I have done rather well, yes.



I have worked hard—first for others, then for myself. I have money in the bank, more in the business. [*Sits down. ANTONIO also sits down.*]

ANTONIO. God be praised, Mario! Tomorrow will be a wonderful day for her.

MARIO. [*Takes a bracelet from his pocket.*] This is for her birthday, tomorrow. Madre will think me rich.

ANTONIO. [*Examining the bracelet.*] Gold, diamonds! How much is it worth, Mario?

MARIO. The stones alone are a thousand dollars. Let me tell you how I got it— [*At sound of door, opening at back, he puts his finger to his lips. ANTONIO returns the bracelet, as MARTA enters.*]

MARTA. [*Handing bills to MARIO.*] The gentleman's change.

MARIO. [*Replaces money without counting it, and hands MARTA a five-dollar bill.*] For the dinner and night's lodging.

MARTA. Dinner, one-fifty. That includes the wine, too. Room, two-fifty. Four dollars in all.

MARIO. Never mind the change. [*Noting MARTA's surprise.*] Keep it on account.

MARTA. [*Graciously.*] I hope the gentleman will be satisfied with everything.

MARIO. I am sure to like it. May I use your telephone, please? I must arrange for my baggage.

MARTA. [*Pointing to door in rear.*] Through the door to the left. [*MARIO goes out.*]

ANTONIO. [*Excitedly.*] Oh, Marta! This is the beginning of good luck for you. A rich man in your house, on your birthday! It's a sure sign, they say.

MARTA. What's the matter with you, Antonio? You get excited over nothing. I shall be lucky, if that bill isn't bad. I must take it to the bank, before he goes away.

ANTONIO. Oh, he'll not go—I mean, not soon. He'll like it here, and stay some time, at least. Fine for you, Marta.

MARTA. Did you learn anything about him, Antonio? What was he showing you when I came in?

ANTONIO. A wonderful bracelet, Marta, all set with stones—diamonds. I'm sure they were diamonds. Worth a thousand dollars, he said.

MARTA. [*In surprise.*] A bracelet with diamonds! Are you sure they were real?

ANTONIO. No doubt, at all. And the man's rich, Marta.

MARTA. [*Suspiciously.*] What would a man be doing here, with a bracelet like that?

ANTONIO. [*Hesitatingly.*] Why,—it's for a lady—a present, you know.

MARIO. [*Entering.*] Well, that's settled. Now for dinner.

MARTA. [*Obsequiously.*] Sorry to keep the gentleman waiting. But there's always a rush, Saturday night. I will look after the matter myself. You may come with me, Antonio. [*MARTA and ANTONIO go out, rear. MARIO walks about the room, looking at everything with great interest, then sits down, right. Enter ELENA with tray on which are various dishes, etc. She puts tray on sideboard, and looks steadily at MARIO for a moment.*]

ELENA. Mario!

MARIO. [*Springing up.*] Elena! You know me.

ELENA. Yes, Mario, and I thank God and the Blessed Virgin for this day. Oh, Mario, I knew you would come.

MARIO. How did you know me? Eleven years change a boy of thirteen into a man.

ELENA. When you first spoke to me, something told me you were no stranger. When you talked with your mother, I was sure of it. Oh, she must know at once! [*Starts for door, rear.*]

MARIO. Wait, Elena. Listen. Tomorrow is her birthday—the day I went away. I will tell her then. I will give her myself as a birthday gift.

ELENA. Oh, Mario, I am so glad you have come back. [*She puts the various dishes on the table.*]

MARIO. And so am I, Elena. I have been planning on this for a long time.

ELENA. And to be here on her birthday—what a surprise!

MARIO. This will surprise her too, Elena. [*Takes out the bracelet, hands it to her, and seats himself at the table, facing audience.*]

ELENA. [*Admiring the bracelet.*] Oh, how beautiful! I never saw anything so fine before. It must have cost a good deal, Mario.

MARIO. It cost me nothing but a kind act. It is a strange story, Elena. One night I saw two thieves set upon a man in a dark street. I ran to help him. [*He begins to eat.*]

ELENA. [*Serving him.*] That was brave of you.

MARIO. They would have killed him to get this bracelet, and he did die later of his wounds. He gave the bracelet to me. He said it had brought him nothing but ill luck.

ELENA. What an adventure! And what a wonderful bracelet!

MARIO. Yes, don't you think she will like it? It will mean good luck to her.

ELENA. But your return will mean more to her. She needs you, Mario.

MARIO. I am going to make up for the past, Elena, in every way I can. When I ran away, I felt abused, outraged. As I got older, I began to see that instead of being wronged, I had wronged her—had deserted her—left her to fight the world alone.

ELENA. You were only a boy, then.

MARIO. Yes, I deserted. I never felt it so clearly as tonight. Poor Madre looks fifty-five, instead of forty-five. She is gray and careworn. I could have saved her from all this. But she need never work again. I will take good care of her.

ELENA. And she will be happy now. [*Pause.*] Does the place seem the same to you, Mario?

MARIO. Just the same, only smaller, and dingy.

ELENA. And the people—you knew us all?

MARIO. Oh, yes, but you have changed. [*With evident admiration.*] My little playmate is now so—so tall. You are quite a young lady.

ELENA. Yes, yes. But tell me, Mario, why have you never written your mother?

MARIO. First, I feared I would be brought back—and then, foolish pride. [*Eagerly.*] Tell me about her, Elena, has she had a hard time?

ELENA. Of course, she has been unhappy.

MARIO. I mean has she had to work hard to make ends meet?

ELENA. It was hard at first for her to keep the place going. It pays better now, but she works as hard as ever.

MARIO. And why is that? [*He stops eating.*]

ELENA. She is most unhappy when idle. At work she forgets, she says. But you are not eating. Your dinner will get cold.

MARIO. I can't eat now. I've no appetite.

[*MARTA enters at door, back.*]

MARTA. Rosa needs your help, for a minute, Elena. [*ELENA goes out door, back.*] Everything all right?

MARIO. [*Beginning to eat again, with apparent relish.*] The dinner is very good, indeed. This is a fine café.

MARTA. [*Drily.*] A fine place for hard work.

MARIO. But surely you don't manage the place alone. You have children—a son, perhaps?

MARTA. [*Coldly.*] I have no one. [*She serves him a glass of water, from sideboard. He smiles at her, as he takes the glass. She returns his look with cold indifference. Enter ELENA. MARTA goes out rear.*]

ELENA. She didn't know you?

MARIO. [*Sadly.*] No, not yet. Tell me, Elena, how long have you been here?

ELENA. A long time. Ever since you went away, almost.

MARIO. But you were so young then—not over ten.

ELENA. I couldn't help much, of course, but she said I was company. Oh, Mario, she was so unhappy. I

stay here all the time now, except Sundays. Father wants me to give it up.

MARIO. He thinks it is too hard for you?

ELENA. He thinks I ought to go to school. He wants me to have advantages, like other girls, he says, piano lessons, too. I had to give all that up, when I came here.

MARIO. [*With suppressed emotion.*] Elena, Elena!

ELENA. Now that you have come, I wouldn't be missed, perhaps. You will manage it all. Just think what you can do, Mario, now you are rich.

MARIO. Oh, Elena! I begin to doubt that. You are the rich one. [*A pause.*] Do you remember how we played in this very room, as children?

ELENA. Yes, Mario.

MARIO. Right over there, in the corner, you had a little table, and you would set it in fine style for the two of us, and Madre would make little cakes for you to serve. Do you remember, Elena?

ELENA. [*Softly.*] Yes, Mario.

MARIO. [*Eagerly.*] And we planned just how we would run the restaurant together, when we grew up. Do you remember that, Elena?

ELENA. [*Turning away in confusion.*] I must clear up the table now. It is getting late.

MARIO. [*Rising.*] So, little comrade, when I ran away, you filled my place. You took the post I deserted.

ELENA. I was so sorry for her. I was sorry for you, too, Mario.

MARIO. Sorry for me?

ELENA. Yes. I used to wonder where you were, and I prayed you might not be cold or hungry, and I had faith you would come back.

MARIO. [*Going toward her.*] You good angel! I hope, sometime, to repay you for this.

ELENA. There is something you can do for me now—tonight, Mario.

MARIO. What is it?

ELENA. Don't wait till tomorrow. Let your mother

know tonight. Let me tell her. I want to see her happiness. I shall not be here tomorrow. Let me tell her tonight, Mario.

MARIO. [*A pause.*] You may tell her. Your right is better than mine.

ELENA. Oh, thank you, Mario. You make me so happy. Now to arrange it. Your room is there. [*Pointing to door left.*] Father and I will go home at once, and I will bring the flowers I have for her birthday. We will be back soon. You are to retire as though nothing had happened. Leave the rest to me. If you fall asleep, your mother will surely waken you. [*Holds out her hand.*] Now good night, and happy dreams.

MARIO. [*Taking both her hands in his.*] Good night, Elena. God bless you and keep you. [*MARIO goes out door left.*]

ELENA. How excited I am over all that has happened! My cheeks burn so! [*A pause.*] Father is right. I must go to school again. Now to work. [*She begins to clear up table, putting things in order. Enter MARTA and ANTONIO.*]

ANTONIO. Not done yet, Elena? Where is the stranger?

ELENA. Gone to his room.

ANTONIO. He must be tired after so long a journey.

MARTA. Long journey, indeed! I do believe you would think him from the moon, if he said so, Antonio.

ANTONIO. [*Significantly.*] I know more about him, perhaps, than you think I do. Wonderful things happen sometimes, Marta.

MARTA. [*Ironically.*] A thousand-dollar bracelet! We'll have the police here tomorrow.

ANTONIO. [*With enthusiasm.*] Just you remember what I said about good luck, Marta.

MARTA. Luck, bah! Drudge and slave! Work till I drop! That's my luck. A diamond bracelet for some idle hussy! No doubt he stole it.

ELENA. [*Nervously.*] Father, I'm ready now. Let

us go. Good night, Aunt Marta. [ELENA and ANTONIO go toward door right.]

ANTONIO. [At the door.] You will see that I am a good prophet, this time. Good night, Marta. [ELENA and ANTONIO go out, right. MARTA looks after them a moment. A look of greedy cunning comes into her face. She goes quietly to door, left, listens at keyhole, turns the knob softly, opens the door a little, looks in, and listens. She closes the door again, and stands irresolute. She goes to street door and listens, then to door, rear, and listens. Then she goes to sideboard, opens a drawer, takes out a dagger, and hides it in her bosom. She opens door left, again, and goes stealthily in. Long pause, then sound of a struggle.]

MARIO. [From within.] Murder! Help! Oh, help! [MARTA rushes out. Her hair is disheveled, her face drawn, a wild look in her eyes. She is shaking with excitement. She has the bracelet in her hand.]

MARIO. [From within.] Help! Oh, God! I am dying! [MARTA starts back in terror. From within is heard sound of unsteady steps. MARIO staggers in. He is in his shirt sleeves, his hair disordered, his face drawn with pain and wonder. MARTA shrinks farther back. She still holds the bracelet.]

MARIO. [In agonized tones.] You—you! Oh, Madre! Don't you know me? I am Mario, your boy.

MARTA. [Putting her hands to her head.] No, no! Not Mario! Not my boy! God, I shall go mad!

MARIO. [Holding out his hands.] I am Mario—come back to you. [He falls to the floor.]

MARTA. [Rushes to him, and kneels by his head.] My boy! Mario! Oh, oh! [Raising her arms.] Kill me now, oh God! Strike me dead!

MARIO. You didn't know—you didn't know. [Noise at street door right. ANTONIO and ELENA hurry into the room. ELENA is carrying lilies.]

ANTONIO. [Entering.] We heard a cry. [Coming

to center.] Blood! Oh, Mother of God! What has happened?

MARTA. [*Moaning.*] I—oh, oh!

MARIO. A thief stabbed me—the window was open.

ELENA. [*Drops the lilies at MARIO's feet, and cries in grief and anguish.*] Mario, Mario! Holy Virgin! And the first night in your mother's house!

MARIO. [*With effort.*] Forgive me, Madre, for running away.

MARTA. [*Moaning hysterically.*] Let me die! Let me die!

MARIO. [*With great effort.*] Kiss me, Madre. Put your hand on my head and pray for me—as you did when I was little. I am going to sleep—now— [*His head falls on her lap, his body relaxes. All note the change. ANTONIO pulls off his cap.*]

MARTA. [*Screaming and throwing herself across MARIO's body.*] Mario! [*ELENA and ANTONIO cross themselves and kneel. ELENA's lips move in prayer. The curtain falls slowly.*]



# ONESIMUS

A BIBLICAL PLAY

## CHARACTERS

PHILEMON, *head of the church at Colossæ.*

APPHIA, *his daughter.*

ARCHIPPUS, *his steward.*

PASHUR, *a money lender.*

ONESIMUS, *a runaway slave.*

*The action takes place at Colossæ, in the autumn of 63 A. D.*

# ONESIMUS

## A BIBLICAL PLAY

*The curtain rises, disclosing the portico of PHILEMON's house. There is a bench, left front. PHILEMON is walking to and fro, showing sorrow and dejection. ARCHIPPUS looks on, with respect and compassion.*

PHILEMON. I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me He is turned; He turneth his hand against me all the day. [*Beats his breast.*] He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out. He hath made my chain heavy. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me to pieces. He hath made me desolate. [*Beats his breast.*]

ARCHIPPUS. The Lord will not cast off forever: but though he cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

PHILEMON. Archippus, I am utterly undone. My goods are wasted, and my head bowed down. Would Paul were here to help me!

ARCHIPPUS. Long hath it been since we had tidings of him.

PHILEMON. I do fear that Stephen's fate hath compassed him.

ARCHIPPUS. His counsel still abideth. We must be strong in the Lord, and in His mighty power.

PHILEMON. Yea, we must put on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Hast heard aught touching Onesimus?

ARCHIPPUS. Naught save this report; he joined a Phrygian cohort, setting out for Rome.

PHILEMON. The base, ungrateful slave!

ARCHIPPUS. So young and fair to look upon, but Satan filled his heart.

PHILEMON. I held him as a hired servant rather than a slave, and thus did he requite me: he stole my goods and ran away. All my misfortunes come from his iniquity.

ARCHIPPUS. True, our affliction hath been grievous from that day.

PHILEMON. And each woe doth beget a greater. Now is the greatest come. It was an evil day when I sought help of Pashur.

ARCHIPPUS. Yea, that which I feared hath come upon us.

PHILEMON. I am in his debt a thousand talents, which must be paid straightway with usury. And I have naught to pay withal. Today he comes to reckon with me, and my bond is forfeit.

ARCHIPPUS. [*In distress.*] But will he not have patience with thee yet awhile, till thou canst pay him all?

PHILEMON. Nay, good Archippus, he is a Pharisee. He doth demand strict justice; mercy knoweth he not.

ARCHIPPUS. And thou canst not discharge the bond!

PHILEMON. I shall be thrown into prison, and not come forth, until I have paid the uttermost farthing. It is the law.

ARCHIPPUS. [*Beating his breast.*] Woe, woe unto this house! [*Pause.*] Good master, give me leave to go straightway unto the brethren. Perchance they may deliver thee from this Pharisee.

PHILEMON. Go, and God's peace be with thee. Tax not the brethren overmuch for me.

ARCHIPPUS. God's peace be with thee, Master! [*Makes obeisance, by bending the body forward, hands outstretched before him, palms down, and then goes out, right. Enter PASHUR from left.*]

PASHUR. Greetings, good Philemon, and peace be with thee!

PHILEMON. And peace to thee!

PASHUR. The time for reckoning hath come, good Philemon. Thou dost owe a thousand talents with the usury. Today thy bond is forfeit.

PHILEMON. Alas! Have patience with me yet awhile, and I will pay thee all.

PASHUR. The covenant reads payment for today. Tomorrow is the first of Tizri. It is not lawful to consider business during the Feast of Trumpets.

PHILEMON. I cannot pay thee now. Forbear a little.

PASHUR. Thus do ye Christians set at naught both law and justice, and covenants are meaningless. And yet ye rail at us, who are most strict in our observances. God ruleth the world by law and order, and hath done so since first he laid the earth's foundation. The sun ever cometh at the appointed time. The tides rise and fall in measured flow. The month of Nisan bringeth flowers, and winter's cold taketh them away. The vine and fig tree yield their fruits, according to their season. And sun and tide and flower and fruit obey God's law. And so among the tribes that fill the earth, God hath a chosen one, whose sons love law and order, speak truth, keep faith, fulfill.

PHILEMON. Have mercy! [*A pause. PASHUR walks to and fro. APPHIA appears at curtained door, rear.*]

PASHUR. Thou mayest discharge the bond after this fashion. Thou hast a daughter, fairest of all the Phrygian maidens. She hath found great favor in mine eyes. Give her to me, and take thy bond.

PHILEMON. [*In astonishment.*] What sayest thou, Pashur?

PASHUR. Give me Apphia to wife, and take thy bond.

PHILEMON. How canst thou, a Pharisee, ask this thing?

PASHUR. O that she might be mine! I long for her, and sigh for her. She is the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys.

PHILEMON. This cannot be.

PASHUR. The debt will thus be paid. I will do more. I will restore thy broken fortunes.

[*APPHIA disappears.*]

PHILEMON. She will not, cannot, marry an unbeliever.

PASHUR. I pray thee, give her to me. My parents will then come to thee, and make offer for her, and the espousal be confirmed by vows and presents. Oh, give consent, Philemon. Thou hast the right and power to dispose of her as thou wishest.

PHILEMON. I cannot. We Christians do not hold that custom. She shall choose a man for her husband. I have said it. It is a vow. Nor would I have her wed to one like thee.

PASHUR. Because I bow not to the man of Galilee.

PHILEMON. He is the true Messiah.

PASHUR. A good rabbi, verily, who taught great truths. But do not our own rabbis teach the same? It was great Hillel, our first Nasi, who said, "Do not unto others what thou wouldst not have done unto thyself." And this before the Nazarene was born. Give me the maiden, Philemon. Have peace and comfort for thine old age.

PHILEMON. Nay, I cannot. No more of this, I pray. I am thy bondsman, debtor, yea, thy slave. Do with me as thou wilt. One boon I ask. Give me a little time to set my house in order. I will not tarry long. And now farewell. God's peace be with thee!

PASHUR. I would have saved thee this. Peace and farewell! [*PASHUR goes out left.*]

PHILEMON. O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me. Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. And hide not thy face from thy servant, for I am in trouble. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.

[Enter APPHIA quietly from back. PHILEMON does not see her, but beats his breast in grief.]

APPHIA. [Goes to him and puts her hand on his arm.] My father!

PHILEMON. O daughter, ruin hath come upon us. Ruin doth destroy our house, and affliction is our portion. My bond to Pashur I cannot redeem. I shall be sold in slavery. O Apphia, Apphia, my daughter, that thou shouldst beg thy bread from strangers.

APPHIA. Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

PHILEMON. There is no time for our deliverance. Today are we undone. Tonight the stars will look on me in bondage.

APPHIA. God will deliver us. Did he not lead our fathers through the flood? Did he not stay the sun over Gibeon? Did he not save Daniel from the lion's jaw, and David from the giant's spear? And surely he will rescue us. Have courage, O my father!

PHILEMON. Thou hast a strange, calm faith, my daughter. Yet am I filled with bitterness. It is for thee I fear. Since Miriam, thy mother, fell asleep, thou hast been my only consolation. Now art thou left with no defense, with none to help or comfort.

APPHIA. Fear not for me, for I can make fine linen, or glean among the sheaves, if there be need, like Ruth.

ARCHIPPUS. [Enters from right and makes obeisance.] Master, I have spoken with the brethren, Rufus, Appelles, Gaius, and the rest, who gather on the Lord's day in our house. And Nymphas from the Laodicean church sends love and greetings. Each offereth all he hath. Alas,

from all the sum is scarce a talent. They are rich in love, but poor in goods.

PHILEMON. God bless them for the gift of love. Good Archippus, thy striving hath been in vain. Faithfully hast thou served me. I owe thee much in substance and in love. Yet I must add to the great debt I owe thee. Behold Apphia. Be to her a brother in the flesh, as thou art in the spirit. Let her not want for bread. My heart is wormwood, and my throat is parched. [*Brokenly.*] Speech faileth me.

ARCHIPPUS. O master, sorrow fills me. How can I see the stranger take thy house and lands, thy fields and vineyards and thy pleasant groves?

PHILEMON. God hath ordained it.

APPHIA. God will deliver us, in a way ye know not of. What said Paul? Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

PHILEMON. I will visit the brethren and receive their blessing, and give them thanks for what they would have given. Come with me, good Archippus, for I am unsteady. Affliction hath made me very old. God bless thee, daughter, for thy faith. Farewell! [PHILEMON and ARCHIPPUS *go out right.*]

APPHIA. Farewell, my father, and be strong.

PASHUR. [*Enters from left, and looks about.*] I seek thy father. [*He turns to go.*]

APPHIA. Nay, tarry here awhile. I have somewhat to say unto thee.

PASHUR. Thy words are music to mine ears and heart.

APPHIA. My father is in thy debt. He cannot pay, according to the covenant. [PASHUR *bows.*] It lieth in thy power to despoil him utterly. Thou wilt forgive the debt, if thou canst take me for thy wife. [PASHUR *starts in surprise.*] Nay, dissemble not. I heard thee say it.

PASHUR. Apphia, hear my words. Naught separates thy father's fields from mine, save landmarks. I am rich in lands and cattle, corn and oil. Thou mayest be as a queen within my house, my only spouse forever.



APPHIA. Thou hast great possessions, not true riches.

PASHUR. I am of ancient lineage, a grandson of Gamaliël, practised in all the arts and in the learning of our schools.

APPHIA. There is a wisdom thou hast not found.

PASHUR. [*Pleading.*] And, Apphia, I have loved thee from the time that we, as children, played together. If thou come not, no other ever shall. My hearth shall be forever desolate.

APPHIA. [*Moved.*] Stay! No more. Thou wouldst buy me for a thousand talents. Were not my father bound to thee in debt, I would say nay.

PASHUR. O Apphia, why say nay? Am I not honorable? I do not kill nor steal. I do not bear false witness, and I defraud no one. I honor my father and mother. I tithe and feed the poor. What lack I yet?

APPHIA. The law of love, self-sacrifice. [*Pause.*]

PASHUR. [*To himself.*] The law of love, self-sacrifice. [*To APPHIA.*] Thou wilt not consent?

APPHIA. Pashur, I do consent. Albeit thou must know it is but for my father's sake and the love I bear him.

PASHUR. Thy love for him is great.

APPHIA. There is a greater love, that a man lay down his life for his friends. [*She turns to door, right.*]

PASHUR. [*To himself.*] To lay down one's life!

APPHIA. I see my father coming in the street. He must not know why we have so agreed. I shall say that I have chosen thee. Do thou keep silence.

PASHUR. [*Steps toward her.*] O Apphia!

APPHIA. [*Raising her hand to check him.*] No more. My father nears. Thou hast my promise, be content. [*PASHUR crosses to rear center. Enter PHILEMON and ARCHIPPUS, right.*]

PHILEMON. Now, Pashur, I am ready to satisfy the bond. [*Crosses left, and sits. APPHIA goes to him and puts her hand on his shoulder.*]

ARCHIPPUS. Noble Pashur, thou are not of our faith,

but thou art honorable. My master is infirm and old. It is but a little time till God shall gather him unto his fathers. I do beseech thee, take me, instead of him, to be thy slave. I am young and strong.

PASHUR. [*In surprise.*] Thou wouldst serve for him!

ARCHIPPUS. Yea, gladly will I take upon myself his debt. Take me. Oh, bring not his gray hairs in sorrow to the grave.

APPHIA. Entreat not to make this sacrifice, good Archippus. God hath pointed out a way; I have chosen Pashur for my husband. He doth forgive my father's debt, and ruin will not visit us.

PHILEMON. [*Rises, starts in surprise, and speaks sternly.*] Nay, this cannot be! [*Sound of tumult, outside, right. A trumpet is heard. Voices cry; "What ho!" "Lay hold of him!" "Nay, stand back!"*] ARCHIPPUS goes out right, quickly. APPHIA crosses right and looks out.]

PHILEMON. It shall not be, I say. My daughter cannot be unequally yoked with an unbeliever.

APPHIA. Hast thou not promised I should choose? Dost thou, a Christian, fail to keep thy vow?

PHILEMON. [*Pleading.*] Daughter, consider well. Thou canst not choose this man.

APPHIA. I have chosen.

ARCHIPPUS. [*Rushes in, speaking excitedly.*] O master, master. It is Onesimus!

PHILEMON. What sayest thou?

ARCHIPPUS. Onesimus, the slave, hath come, and prayeth that he may speak to thee. [APPHIA crosses left, and goes up to her father.]

PHILEMON. Call the guard quickly, lest he escape again. He must be flogged.

ARCHIPPUS. [*Looking to left.*] He cometh, even now.

[*Enter ONESIMUS. He stops before PHILEMON, and makes sign of servile obedience. This is done by placing the right hand on the forehead, lips, and heart, then dropping on one knee, ex-*

*tending hands, first forward, palms downward, then moving them outward and backward.]*

ONESIMUS. Pardon, master, pardon!

PHILEMON. [*In wrath.*] Base and unprofitable slave!

ONESIMUS. Base and unprofitable, yea, worse, hating the light, and loving darkness. Visit thy wrath upon me. But first, I pray, hear a letter that I am charged to read to thee.

PHILEMON. Who sends me tidings by a slave?

ONESIMUS. Paul, who was Saul of Tarsus once, but now a follower of the Nazarene, thy brother and mine.

PHILEMON. Thank God for word from Paul! How doth he fare? Where is he? Speak!

ONESIMUS. He is at Rome, a prisoner in chains. [*Pause. All start and show sorrow.*] Command me, master, now to read the letter.

PHILEMON. Read straightway, slave. [ARCHIPPUS sits again.]

ONESIMUS. [*Rises, steps back, takes a scroll from his bosom and reads.*] "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ and Timothy, our beloved brother, unto Philemon, our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house: Grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds."

ARCHIPPUS. [*Interrupting.*] What saith he touching Onesimus?

PHILEMON. Peace, Archippus, and thou, Onesimus, read on.

ONESIMUS. [*Continues reading.*] "Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and me: whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: but without thy mind would I do nothing,

that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldst receive him forever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord."

PHILEMON. [*Rises, starting forward.*] Hold, Onesimus! Thou didst read, "a brother in the Lord." Doth it so stand?

ONESIMUS. Yea, master, I am a Christian.

PHILEMON. O praise the Lord, bless his holy name!

ARCHIPPUS. Amen and amen!

PHILEMON. [*Eagerly.*] Speak on, Onesimus, of Paul, and of thyself. How camest thou to find the Way? [*PHILEMON sits again.*]

ONESIMUS. Master and brethren, hear me. I served in Rome as a centurion. I kept watch at the prison gate, and thus fell in with Paul, and heard his story: how he had erstwhile persecuted the brethren; how on the way to Damascus, he had seen the risen Lord; how he was obedient unto the heavenly vision; how he ministered for Christ, labored abundantly, oft suffered forty stripes, save one, was beaten with rods, stoned, suffered shipwreck; how he journeyed much in peril of robbers, of his own countrymen, and of false brethren, in peril of the sea and wilderness.

PHILEMON. God hath kept him from falling.

ONESIMUS. Many in Rome heard him gladly. Some of the soldiers did forsake their sins; some from the palace came to Christ.

PHILEMON. The Master's teaching from the mouth of Paul hath mighty power.

ONESIMUS. The Master's spirit in Paul's life doth move men's hearts; thus mine was moved. His words had gone deep in my soul; I was sore vexed and troubled by my load. One night, as I held watch before the gate, I heard Paul and the others singing hymns. And lo! about the seventh hour a great light shone about me: and

looking whence the light had come, I saw King Jesus! Trembling and much afraid, I cried, "Lord, what shall I do?" He smiled and said, "Onesimus, follow me." I fell upon my knees and on my face, as in a swoon. When I arose, darkness again covered me. The great light shone within.

PASHUR. [*To himself.*] The light within!

ONESIMUS. I shall be his witness unto all men of what I have seen and heard. Therefore, do I come to make amends, to bow before thy punishment, to serve thee faithfully, as thy slave, forever. [*Makes profound obeisance, as before, and kneels.*]

PHILEMON. [*Rising, goes to ONESIMUS.*] A slave no longer! I do set thee free. As thou art free in Christ, so art thou free in body, Onesimus, my brother. [*Embraces ONESIMUS and kisses his cheek.*]

ONESIMUS. Even so, master, still I serve thee gladly.

PASHUR. Hearken ye all to me. Apphia, here is thy father's bond. Tear it to pieces. He owes me naught. And Apphia, before God and these witnesses, I do release thee from thy promise.

APPHIA. Dost release me!

PASHUR. Yea, thou shalt not sacrifice thyself. My love is now so great that I do give thee up. Thou art free.

APPHIA. [*Gently, extending her hands toward him.*] Pashur, good Pashur!

PASHUR. Nay, refrain. I am unworthy to receive thy thanks. Thy blessing give me.

PHILEMON. What meaneth this, good Pashur?

PASHUR. I have chosen the way of truth. I—I, too, am a Christian.

PHILEMON. O Pashur, thou art a chosen vessel to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.

ONESIMUS. Amen!

PASHUR. I will humbly follow the Nazarene all my days.

APPHIA. [*Crossing to PASHUR, takes his hand.*] But not alone, for I will go with thee.

PHILEMON. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.

ONESIMUS. Nay, not yet. Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are fathers.

APPHIA. Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death.

PASHUR. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.

ONESIMUS. Hear ye Paul's closing words; he doth send his benediction. [*The others bow their heads as ONESIMUS, with outstretched hand, reads.*] "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirits. Amen."

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY

# THE BARGAIN

A TRAGICOMEDY

## CHARACTERS

MRS. PRINGLE 40

MRS. RELLING

MRS. CARVEL 55

REV. MR. MOREHOUSE

*The action takes place in the Pringle home, in a small town in California.*



# THE BARGAIN

## A TRAGICOMEDY

*A simply furnished living room. There is a table in center, various chairs, etc. As curtain rises, MRS. PRINGLE is disclosed, dusting the room, and setting things to rights. She is a woman of forty, thin and angular, hair slightly gray. She has arched eyebrows, which give her an air of constant expectancy, and her whole expression is one of keen curiosity. She is plainly dressed.*

*Knock at door, right. She steps to door, left, and throws out the dust cloth and feather duster, then goes to door right, and admits MRS. CARVEL. The latter is a woman between fifty and fifty-five. She is ordinary looking, stout, and with a melancholy expression. Like MRS. PRINGLE, she is of the middle class. She carries a plate of cookies in her hand.*

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, for pity's sake! Come in, Mrs. Carvel. I was just wishing someone would come. I haven't seen a soul to speak to since Jim left, at six this morning. And here you are, bringing me cookies again. [*Takes the plate.*] Come, sit down! [*As MRS. CARVEL is about to take a chair, right.*] No, take this chair. [*Indicating rocker, back of table.*] It will fit you better.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Seats herself as directed.*] Well, I've been trying to get over for some time, but something

always prevents. I made cookies this morning, and planned right then to bring you some. I hope you like 'em.

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Who has been eating one.*] They are just fine! It is so good to have something now and then that you don't make yourself. But goodness! This is twice you have brought me things, since I took you over anything.

MRS. CARVEL. No, you brought me something last. Don't you remember the raised doughnuts?

MRS. PRINGLE. Was that after you brought over the fig cake? [*Sits herself, left.*]

MRS. CARVEL. Yes, it was the day before the girls came.

MRS. PRINGLE. I guess you are right. Well, I like to be neighborly, and I like to live near people who feel the same way.

MRS. CARVEL. Yes, that is right.

MRS. PRINGLE. But it ain't in some people. Now there's Jim—a good man and a good provider. I'll be taking something across the street, and he'll say, "You are always giving things out, and nobody sends anything in to you." But I says to him, "If we do our part, others will do theirs, and we won't get the worst of it."

MRS. CARVEL. I appreciate a good neighbor. I don't know what I would have done this last year, if I hadn't lived next door to you. You've been a friend I could come to and talk things over with.

MRS. PRINGLE. Yes, to be sure. I suppose you are pretty lonesome now, since the girls left.

MRS. CARVEL. Well, not that, exactly. I was glad to have them come, and I'm glad they are gone. We get on together, all right, of course; but I didn't see them much, when we lived in the same town. They don't understand things here. I couldn't talk to them as I do to you.

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Severely.*] Well, you need someone to talk straight to you. You are not looking well at all.

You've been all worn out and run down, since the funeral. It's all over now, and you ought to chirk up, and enjoy life.

MRS. CARVEL. Yes, yes, I know. But there are so many things to look after.

MRS. PRINGLE. As I said to Jim, you have no license to be in the dumps. We're right glad the old man left everything to you. How much will it be?

MRS. CARVEL. Twenty thousand dollars. Maybe a thousand or two more. We can't tell exactly, until the estate is all settled.

MRS. PRINGLE. Twenty thousand! Some folks said it might be forty thousand, the old man pared things so close. Well, twenty thousand is as much as anyone needs. You can have everything you want now, and no worry.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Dejectedly.*] There's always something to worry about.

MRS. PRINGLE. Why should you worry, with all that money? But it's a bit strange that your uncle didn't remember anyone else? Now there's your cousin, Mrs. Relling. She did lots for him. Do you know I am wondering how she feels about the old man leaving all his property to you. And the Rellings are hard up, too.

MRS. CARVEL. Do you think she expected to get something?

MRS. PRINGLE. Of course she did. Didn't she go over to see the old man once or twice every week, that is, when she could get away?

MRS. CARVEL. She came sometimes, so I could go up town.

MRS. PRINGLE. But didn't she take him jam and cake and such things? And didn't she read to him, too? And her sister-in-law, Mrs. Piver, told me that Mrs. Relling was to get half. Jim always said it was nip and tuck as to which of you would get the most out of the old man.

MRS. CARVEL. Well, Ida might have made a deal with uncle to take the place. She had the chance.

MRS. PRINGLE. But she had a sick husband to look

after. No doubt she figured on the old man dividing things up a bit. It must have been a hard blow to her. And there's that other niece, who took care of him before you came.

MRS. CARVEL. Cousin Minnie, you mean.

MRS. PRINGLE. Yes. Couldn't they make a claim for taking care of him? Could they break the will?

MRS. CARVEL. No, indeed. You see—well, I might as well tell you just how it came about. But you mustn't mention it. I don't want people to talk about it. Uncle had everything made over to me, before he died—made over in trust, they call it.

MRS. PRINGLE. But there was a will. I saw it in the paper.

MRS. CARVEL. Yes, but the will didn't count. It didn't mean anything.

MRS. PRINGLE. Then why did he make it?

MRS. CARVEL. He wanted people to think he left the property by will.

MRS. PRINGLE. For pity's sake! I don't understand it at all. What's at the bottom of it, anyway?

MRS. CARVEL. Well, you know, when I came west, just after uncle had got back from the Old People's Home—

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Interrupting.*] Mighty sick of it, he was, too. He told me he would rather go to the poor-house, than give that crowd his money.

MRS. CARVEL. Yes, six months was enough, there. Cousin Ida—Mrs. Relling, you know—couldn't take care of him, and he'd had an awful row with Cousin Minnie. So he sent for me. I was willing to stay with him till he died, and I told him so; [*Emphatically.*] but I was to have all the property.

MRS. PRINGLE. But what about the will business?

MRS. CARVEL. You will see in a minute. Uncle was willing to give me half of the property. I said no. It would be all or nothing for me.

MRS. PRINGLE. Why not all? He had no children. He had to leave it to some one.

MRS. CARVEL. You know how close he was in everything. Well, he offered me two-thirds. I made arrangements to go back to Iowa the next day.

MRS. PRINGLE. But you didn't go.

MRS. CARVEL. He finally gave in, and said he would call a lawyer to have the will made, leaving me everything. I had been thinking it over, too, and I saw a lawyer about it. My lawyer said that uncle might change the will at any time, leaving me out. So I insisted that the property be left so I would be sure to get it.

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, for pity's sake!

MRS. CARVEL. Then we had to start all over again. He said he wouldn't put the property out of his name, while he lived, for anyone. He would go back to the Old People's Home, first. I said, all right, and began to pack up my things. Then he coaxed, and he promised, and he abused me—what a fight it was—right up to train time. But I had my mind made up. He had to come to my terms, and we made the bargain.

MRS. PRINGLE. I wouldn't have believed the old man would make that bargain with anyone.

MRS. CARVEL. What else could he do? Ida couldn't come, and Minnie wouldn't. He didn't know my sisters, and he was afraid of strangers.

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, when you had it fixed as you wanted it, why did he make a will?

MRS. CARVEL. He wanted people to think that he controlled the property till he died. He was sensitive about it, and the will saved his pride. So don't speak of what I've told you—for uncle's sake, you know.

MRS. PRINGLE. I guess he didn't want people to know that you got the upper hand of him.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Nettled.*] It wasn't a matter of anyone having the upper hand. I was willing to do my part, and I had a right to know that he would do his.

MRS. PRINGLE. But you had the advantage, just the

same. You could back out, if you got sick of the bargain, but he couldn't.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Stiffly.*] You think it wasn't a fair bargain?

MRS. PRINGLE. Fair enough. Of course it was fair. But after all, you had the best of it.

MRS. CARVEL. What do you mean, Mrs. Pringle?

MRS. PRINGLE. I mean you got your money pretty easy. Now isn't that true? You got twenty thousand dollars for a year's work—less than a year, wasn't it?

MRS. CARVEL. A year, lacking six days. But look at the chances I took! The doctor told me that uncle might live ten years longer. It wouldn't have been much pay for a ten-year job.

MRS. PRINGLE. But it was a lot of money for one year.

MRS. CARVEL. And then suppose I had died before he did? I took that chance, too.

MRS. PRINGLE. Oh, it was fair enough. I only meant, as it turned out, you got the best of it.

MRS. CARVEL. And the way I had to fight with him over expenses! I said once, "We are going to have what we want to eat, and if the bills are high, I am the only one who will lose by it." He never said a word about expenses, after that.

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, he was the closest man I ever knew. After his wife died, before he had anyone with him, I used to take him over things to eat, sometimes. He would always say, "Thank you, Mrs. Pringle." But do you suppose he ever offered me anything? Not he. When the black cherries were ripe, I thought sure he would give me some. So I took him over a nice berry pie. "Thank you, Mrs. Pringle," says he. "You are going to have lots of fine cherries," says I. "Yes," says he, "unless the birds get 'em!" Now how could anyone be neighborly with a man like that?

MRS. CARVEL. I had to put up with it. Well, I'm glad I did my part. I looked after everything, mended

his clothes, cooked the meals—and you know how inconvenient that kitchen is.

MRS. PRINGLE. You've got the gas stove in now, I suppose.

MRS. CARVEL. No—not yet.

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, for pity's sake! And you always saying if you owned the place, you wouldn't go two days without fixing up that kitchen.

MRS. CARVEL. I've made no changes yet. I've had so much to think about.

MRS. PRINGLE. Oh, I forgot—there's your trip to the Islands. After your plans are made, you have to get your clothes ready.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Nervously.*] Yes, yes, there's lots to do.

MRS. PRINGLE. When do you start? Have you set the date?

MRS. CARVEL. No, not exactly. You see—well, maybe I won't make the trip.

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, for pity's sake! You mean to tell me you are not going?

MRS. CARVEL. [*Hastily correcting herself.*] I mean not now. Perhaps later—next year, maybe.

MRS. PRINGLE. And you planning that trip for six months! And all the steamer folders and railroad time-tables you had! I can't make it out. What's come over you?

MRS. CARVEL. [*Putting her hand to her brow.*] It's been a strain on me, Mrs. Pringle. I feel it worse now, than I did before—before he died, I mean.

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, you can forget it, now. You've got your money, and I guess you earned it, all right.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Nervously.*] Yes, yes, of course. But it keeps coming back to me. I can't forget it. I wish I could, but it comes back.

MRS. PRINGLE. What on earth do you mean? What comes back to you?

MRS. CARVEL. [*With increasing agitation.*] I mean

uncle. I think about him. No matter what I'm doing, he comes to my mind. I dreamed about him last night.

MRS. PRINGLE. For pity's sake! But don't let it get on your nerves. Thinking or dreaming either can't hurt you.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Turning toward MRS. PRINGLE, and lowering her voice.*] Did I tell you about uncle going out to work in the garden, the day before he died?

MRS. PRINGLE. No, what about it?

MRS. CARVEL. I told him to stay in. It was a hot day, and what could a man of eighty-six do anyway? Well, he was stubborn, as usual, and went out with his hoe. And it wasn't long before he was all tired out, and leaning on the fence, waiting for me to come and help him in. And I just thought, if he would be so foolish, he could get back to the house as best he could.

MRS. PRINGLE. And you didn't go to help him in?

MRS. CARVEL. No,—you see I didn't think he ought to be encouraged to do such things,—and how could I know that he would pass away next morning?

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Eagerly, anticipating a sensation.*] You don't think that had anything to do with his death?

MRS. CARVEL. Oh, no, not at all. I asked the doctor, and he said, if the work had caused his death, he would have died in the garden.

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Relaxing.*] Oh, well, why should it worry you, then?

MRS. CARVEL. I don't know, but it does. Every time I think of Uncle—oh, this is so foolish of me!

MRS. PRINGLE. Go ahead! What is it?

MRS. CARVEL. Whenever I think of uncle, I can see him leaning on the fence, looking toward the house, and waiting for me to come help him in. [*She shudders perceptibly.*]

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, if you are not shivering! Let me get you a shawl. It's not overwarm in the house. [*She gets a light shawl, and puts it over MRS. CARVEL's shoulders.*]



MRS. CARVEL. Thank you. It is a bit cool.

[*Knock at door right. MRS. PRINGLE goes to door. Enter MRS. RELLING. She is a woman of thirty-seven, with kind face and gentle manners.*]

MRS. PRINGLE. Come right in, Mrs. Relling.

MRS. RELLING. Thank you, Mrs. Pringle. How are you, cousin Kate?

MRS. CARVEL. Pretty well, thank you.

MRS. RELLING. I just stepped in, Mrs. Pringle, to remind you about the old clothes you promised me.

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Critically.*] Well, I should think you had enough to do for your own family, without making over clothes for the foreigners below the tracks. The more you do for such people, the less they do for themselves.

MRS. RELLING. It's the children I want to help. They are not to blame.

MRS. PRINGLE. I spoke to Jim, and he said there was an old pair of trousers you could have. He didn't say which pair, but I'll find out tonight. Do sit down. [MRS. RELLING, *who has been standing, takes chair left, between MRS. CARVEL and MRS. PRINGLE. MRS. PRINGLE sits.*] It's been a month since I've heard any news from your part of town. Stop awhile with us. We're going to have some tea later on. How are all your folks?

MRS. RELLING. Everything is fine with us. You know John is about well now. The doctor thinks he is quite over the trouble, and says he can go back to work the first of the month. We are all so happy.

MRS. PRINGLE. Will he get his old job back?

MRS. RELLING. No, not now. He will get less money, but the work is easier. Archie has a job, too, and he earns enough to make up the difference.

MRS. PRINGLE. But school begins in about a week.

MRS. RELLING. I want him to stop then, but he says no.

MRS. PRINGLE. He'll stop quick enough, when school begins. Boys aren't so fond of work as all that.

MRS. RELLING. He doesn't want me to go out nursing any more. But we will get along now. The worst is over for us.

MRS. PRINGLE. I was saying to Mrs. Carvel that it wouldn't have been amiss, if your uncle had left you a few thousand dollars, after all you had done for him. [*Awkward pause. MRS. CARVEL and MRS. RELLING look embarrassed.*] I'm not one to bring up anything against a person that's dead and gone. Not I. And I'm glad Mrs. Carvel is provided for, but what you did should be appreciated, too.

MRS. RELLING. But uncle appreciated what I did. I'm sure of that.

MRS. PRINGLE. But you didn't get anything for it.

MRS. RELLING. [*Smiling.*] I didn't get any money, you mean, and I didn't expect any.

MRS. PRINGLE. [*In astonishment.*] You didn't!

MRS. RELLING. No. Uncle told me, when cousin Kate came, that he planned to leave his property to her, and that was right. Kate gave up all other plans, to devote her life to him. I was glad for uncle to have someone to lean on, and I was glad to have him provide for Kate. I have a husband and a son,—she has no one. [*Long pause. MRS. CARVEL'S head sinks lower and lower, during the preceding speech. MRS. PRINGLE gasps, and looks from one to the other.*]

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, for pity's sake!

MRS. RELLING. Poor uncle! He tried to be just, I am sure of that, and he was appreciative. Every time I would read to him, he'd say, "Makes me feel good, Ida, to hear about the old town again." And he had a little smile of appreciation. Whenever I think of him, I can see him smiling, in his old arm chair, and can hear him say, "Makes me feel good, Ida."

[*MRS. CARVEL raises her head, and presses her hands to her temples as though in pain. The*

others notice it. MRS. PRINGLE starts toward her.]

MRS. CARVEL. [*Nervously.*] Oh, my head! I told you I had a headache, when I came in. Didn't I?

MRS. PRINGLE. Now that's too bad. Maybe I better get the tea right now. That will help you. [*Starts toward door left.*]

MRS. CARVEL. No, please don't. It's warm in the room. [*Throws shawl back.*] Just let me have a sip of water. [*MRS. PRINGLE goes out left.*]

MRS. RELLING. [*Goes over to MRS. CARVEL, puts hand on her cousin's head, and says gently.*] You must take care of yourself, Kate, or I shall have to look after you, as you looked after uncle.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Shrinking back and speaking hysterically.*] Don't! don't! [*More quietly.*] I'm better now, thank you. [*Enter MRS. PRINGLE with glass of water, which she gives MRS. CARVEL.*] Thank you, Mrs. Pringle, I'm all right now. [*Knock at door, right. MRS. PRINGLE goes to the door, and admits the REV. MR. MOREHOUSE.*]

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, if it ain't Mr. Morehouse. Come in, Pastor.

REV. MOREHOUSE. I'm glad to see you, Mrs. Pringle, and you, too, Mrs. Carvel. I tried to call on you before coming here. How are all your folks, Mrs. Relling?

MRS. RELLING. We're well, thank you. It's so good to have my husband up again, and he's starting back to work. Archie is working, too. We have much to be thankful for.

REV. MOREHOUSE. Well enough to go to work, eh? Well, that's good. And Archie, too. That boy has good stuff in him.

MRS. RELLING. And he doesn't want to stop for school. I wish you would speak to him, Pastor.

REV. MOREHOUSE. I have talked with him, and I understand his viewpoint. I tell you that boy is seeing the big things of life at an early age. I hope he can keep

up his school. But if it comes to a choice, I am not sure that he has not chosen the better part.

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Emphatically.*] I wouldn't have my George stop school to begin money grubbing at that age.

REV. MOREHOUSE. But my dear Mrs. Pringle, the lesson of service,—willing unselfish service, is worth more than anything a boy can get in school. Service to others, cheerfully and kindly given—that is the Christian life. It is that spirit that has touched Archie. It was that spirit that prompted our good friend, Mrs. Carvel, to leave home and friends in the east, and brought her here to brighten the last days of a lonely old man. Truly God blesses us when we give, rather than when we receive. [MRS. CARVEL, *with hand on her brow, lowers her head over the table.*]

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Rising.*] We'll have tea, now. Excuse me a minute, please. [*She goes out left.*]

REV. MOREHOUSE. Well, Mrs. Carvel, how do you like California? After a year with us, you will never want to live anywhere else.

MRS. CARVAL. I don't know. I may go back. My mind is not made up.

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Entering.*] Tea will be ready in a minute. And we are to have some cookies that my good neighbor brought me.

REV. MOREHOUSE. How are things at the plant, Mrs. Pringle? Will the men strike?

MRS. PRINGLE. They are right bitter, Jim says, and can you blame 'em? The owners are millionaires, and the men can't get living wages. Do you think it is right, Pastor, for some to be so rich, when so many can't make a decent living?

REV. MOREHOUSE. Ah, it's a big problem. We must strive, first of all, for fair play for everyone. We must do away with the curse of ill-gotten gains.

MRS. PRINGLE. It doesn't trouble some people how they get the money. They enjoy it just the same.

REV. MOREHOUSE. Don't be so sure of that, Mrs.

Pringle. No one can profit by greed and oppression, and escape punishment, and he who takes advantage of the weak and helpless tortures his own soul.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Moaning hysterically, with head on arms which are outstretched on table.*] Oh—Oh! [*She rises unsteadily. The others start toward her.*] No, no! It's my head, my head!

REV. MOREHOUSE. My dear Mrs. Carvel, what is the matter?

MRS. RELLING. [*Going to her.*] What is it, Kate? Try to control yourself.

MRS. PRINGLE. Can I do anything for you, Mrs. Carvel?

MRS. CARVEL. No, it's my headache—much worse—I must go home.

MRS. PRINGLE. The tea is just ready now. A hot drink will settle your nerves.

MRS. RELLING. No, she will be better at home. I will go with her.

MRS. CARVEL. [*Still hysterical.*] No, I don't want you to go with me. I'll go alone. I'm always better alone. I don't want anyone with me, I say. [*She goes toward door right, accompanied by MRS. RELLING.*]

MRS. RELLING. [*Sympathetically.*] Do take care of yourself, Kate. Take a hot drink, and lie down. Go to sleep, if you can. [*MRS. CARVEL goes out. All resume their seats.*]

MRS. PRINGLE. Well, for pity's sake! I never was so flustered. A nervous headache is just terrible. Now draw up, please. You mustn't go now, till you've had a cup of tea. [*She goes out left.*]

MRS. RELLING. Cousin Kate is not herself, at all. I never saw her in this condition before.

REV. MOREHOUSE. A year of anxiety and care has worn her out. She ought to go away on a trip. It would divert her.

MRS. PRINGLE. [*Entering with the tea and cookies.*] That's just what I tell her, but she doesn't want to go.

[*Serving the tea.*] And mind you, she's been keen to go for six months. She's looked up all the routes, rates, and everything. Why, she'd bring excursion pamphlets over to us, and talk about her plans to Jim and me. Now she's all unsettled about it.

MRS. RELLING. That's strange, isn't it?

MRS. PRINGLE. She doesn't know her mind about anything. She was fighting to get the kitchen fixed up, when the old man was living. Now she is free to do it, and she won't.

REV. MOREHOUSE. She said something about going back east to live. I was surprised at that, for she put her letter into the church, only three months ago. I presume she wants to be near her sisters.

MRS. PRINGLE. Oh, she doesn't care anything about her sisters. That's not it. She's unsettled—just lost interest in everything.

MRS. RELLING. [*Rising.*] Well, Mrs. Pringle, I must be going. I have two hungry people to get dinner for.

MRS. PRINGLE. But you don't have to start dinner now. It's not five yet.

MRS. RELLING. I want to stop in and see Kate a few minutes, before I go home. I may be able to do something for her. Poor cousin! She's had an unhappy life.

REV. MOREHOUSE. And I must go too, Mrs. Pringle. I want to make another call in the neighborhood.

MRS. PRINGLE. Oh, wait a bit, Pastor, and speak to Jim. He will be here, any minute now.

REV. MOREHOUSE. [*Looking at his watch.*] Well, I can stay till five.

MRS. RELLING. Really, I mustn't stop a minute longer. Goodbye, Mrs. Pringle. Goodbye, Pastor. [*She goes out right.*]

MRS. PRINGLE AND REV. MOREHOUSE. Goodbye.

REV. MOREHOUSE. From what I hear, I judge that Mrs. Carvel had a trying time, taking care of her uncle. They say the old gentleman was peculiar.

MRS. PRINGLE. Peculiar! A good deal worse than

peculiar, I'd say, if I allowed myself to bring up anything about a person that's dead and gone. Have some more tea, Pastor.

REV. MOREHOUSE. Hard to get along with, I'm told. Well, what she did was all the more commendable. It is easy for us all to do agreeable things. I am glad her uncle appreciated her, and left her well provided for.

MRS. PRINGLE. Oh, she's got enough, but what good will it ever do her? Now if I were rich like that, I'd try to get some good out of it. I'd make a trip around the world. And I'd have an automobile, one of the best, too, and I'd have a servant to do the work. Not that I believe in showing off, but those who have money, should spend it. Don't you think so, Pastor?

REV. MOREHOUSE. Of course—if spent wisely.

MRS. RELLING. [*Enters suddenly in great agitation.*] She is dead! Cousin Kate is dead! [REV. MOREHOUSE and MRS. PRINGLE start up.]

MRS. PRINGLE. Oh, Mrs. Relling! What are you saying!

REV. MOREHOUSE. Dead! How did it happen? What caused it?

MRS. RELLING. It must have been headache powders. She was lying on the couch, and there was the empty box and some water in a glass. Oh, this is terrible!

REV. MOREHOUSE. Are you sure she was dead? Did you call a doctor?

MRS. RELLING. I telephoned at once, but I fear she is beyond help.

MRS. PRINGLE. Oh, I am so upset!

MRS. RELLING. Poor Kate! I can't think of her as dead.

REV. MOREHOUSE. Think of her as gone to her reward.

MRS. PRINGLE. And leaving all that money! [*She drops into a chair, and the CURTAIN falls.*]





# FIGS AND THISTLES

A MORALITY

## CHARACTERS

RICHARD HASTINGS, *a playwright.*

OSCAR	}	<i>His friends.</i>
STEPHEN		
CORDELIA		
MADELINE		
AGNES		

ROLAND	}	<i>People of his play.</i>
EDWARD		
VICTORIA		
FIDELIA		
ENID		

*The action takes place New Year's Eve, in RICHARD HASTINGS' study.*

# FIGS AND THISTLES

## A MORALITY

[VICTORIA, *as Prologue, comes before the curtain, and addresses the audience.*]

Hearken, sweet friends, our author bids me say  
A word of greeting—welcome to our play.  
Of all the treasured folk that fill his heart,  
Our author chooses Truth to play this part.  
I am the Prologue, and my part will be  
To sound the opening chord, to give the key  
Of what shall follow. Faithfully the stage  
Holds up the mirror to each passing age;  
And we may rightly judge the bygone years,  
By knowing the applause, the smiles and tears  
That cheered the actor, as he played the part  
That lighted up the mind, or stirred the heart.  
For, in the mimic world of joy and strife,  
Nothing is truth that is not truth in life.

Likewise, 'tis true of him who makes the play:  
With moving power, his creatures cannot say  
The truth he doubts, nor can they ever see  
The vision, which to him is mockery.  
And dull and unconvincing is the part  
That has not glowed within the author's heart.  
For wise words are not spoken by a fool,  
And sweet streams flow not from a bitter pool.

Our lives are what we know, what we believe,  
And we are changed by what we take and give.  
Our very thoughts—the thoughts of others, too—  
Are pleading voices; be they false or true,  
They are the constant drops that wear the stone;  
For no one liveth to himself, alone.

Our play, we trust, runs true to Nature's laws,  
And may our players please and win applause.

[*The Prologue bows, and with hand on the curtain, pushes it aside, following it to the left, as it is drawn, bows again, and goes off, left. A comfortably furnished room is disclosed. There is a table left, front, a book case right, a sofa rear, and various chairs. There is an entrance rear, and one right. On the walls are pictures of Shakespeare, Moliere, and Ibsen. There are books and writing materials on the table. RICHARD HASTINGS is sitting at the table, facing right. He takes up his pen, stretches his arms and yawns, then puts his hand to his head, as though trying to think. There is a knock at rear door.*]

RICHARD. Come in!

[*Enter OSCAR, STEPHEN, CORDELIA, MADELINE, and AGNES. OSCAR is fat, with coarse, good-natured expression. STEPHEN is pessimistic looking. CORDELIA is plump, gaily dressed, and with a profusion of jewelry. MADELINE is more plainly dressed. She has cat-like eyes, suggesting shrewdness and suspicion. AGNES is a vivacious looking girl, much made up, and bold in dress and manner. All of the characters are about thirty years of age, except AGNES, who appears to be about twenty. RICHARD rises to greet them.*]

OSCAR. Here we are, Rich, the same old gang.

RICHARD. Glad to see you all. [*Shaking hands with them.*] How are you, Oscar? Bless you, Cordy, how are you?

CORDELIA. I'm just fine, thank you. We've come to tell you about a plan for tonight. We are going to celebrate New Year's Eve properly. But first of all, we want to congratulate you on your big play. It was simply wonderful.

RICHARD. Not too strong, now. Put on the soft pedal, Cordy.

AGNES. Oh, the play was just grand. We stood up, and waved our handkerchiefs at you. Didn't you see us?

RICHARD. Yes, yes, mighty fine of you. [*Shaking hands with the others.*] How are you, Madeline? Thank you all for the flowers. Sorry I couldn't see you last night, after the play.

MADELINE. You were such a lion last night, no one could see much of you.

RICHARD. How are you tonight, Steve?

STEPHEN. Rotten, thank you.

RICHARD. Sit down, sit down, all of you. What are we all standing around for? This is no reception.

[*They all sit, CORDELIA nearest RICHARD, on the right. Next to her, STEPHEN. AGNES and OSCAR on the sofa, and MADELINE further to the right. RICHARD resumes his seat.*]

OSCAR. Well, Rich, how many sizes too small did you find your hat, this morning? Are you down to earth, yet?

RICHARD. Oh, I believe I am in my right mind by this time.

MADELINE. It was the biggest ovation ever given at the Federal Theatre. That's what the Times said.

RICHARD. I'm glad it made a hit with you, anyway, and I'm glad you dropped in tonight, so I can thank you personally. Last night, you know, I had to talk to the whole audience. I don't remember a blessed word I said. But I hope I didn't talk and look as foolish as I felt.

Now tell me, did the play deserve all that fuss, or is this a conspiracy to make me feel good?

MADELINE. Didn't you see the Times?

RICHARD. Yes, it was fine.

OSCAR. The News certainly handed it to you, all right. Seen it?

RICHARD. No, not yet. What did it say?

OSCAR. Well, here it is. Listen to this, all of you. [*Reads from newspaper.*] "An overflow audience cheered itself hoarse over *The Cost of Conquest*, which had its premier presentation at the Federal Theatre, last night. The plot is well contrived, and seems inevitably to work itself out, so sincere and compelling are the motives. The characters are finely drawn, and true to life. Rarely can the playwright invest his people with qualities in the abstract, and still make them real, living beings. In *The Cost of Conquest*, this is done as surely as if the piece were a morality, and still the characters are, throughout, sincere and human." —And there's a lot more. How does it strike you, for the conservative News?

AGNES. Oh, it's just splendid. No wonder your friends are proud of you.

RICHARD. You are all dear and sweet. But, as my friends, you can do me a greater kindness, than by merely praising my play.

CORDELIA. What do you want us to do, criticize it?

RICHARD. Exactly. Tell me where it is weak. I know it isn't perfect. You have said so many good things about it, now tell me where it failed—where it didn't reach you.

STEPHEN. When you get the crowd and the newspapers, it doesn't matter what individuals think. The play was a big thing, and they all fell for it. But as to characters being true to life, tell me this—why should Victoria make that explanation about her past life?

RICHARD. You mean, why did she tell them the facts?

STEPHEN. That's just it. She could have told another story, and no one would have been the wiser.

OSCAR. She must have been one of those who tell the truth, when a lie would do better. [*They all laugh.*]

STEPHEN. My point is, would any woman, in real life, tell what she did, knowing she would get the worst of it?

AGNES. Come to think it over, that's right. In real life a person has to get by, in some way.

RICHARD. I see your point.

STEPHEN. And isn't Edward's character a bit strained? Why should he give up so much? Ever know a real man to do such a thing?

MADELINE. I certainly never did. In real life, people have to look out for themselves.

CORDELIA. But in plays, people can't be practical. They don't always act as we do.

AGNES. Perhaps that is why we like to see plays.

MADELINE. Now let me give my comment—no criticism, mind you. To my mind, Enid is altogether too unsophisticated. You can't make me believe that any girl, of her age, is so ignorant of the world. A girl of eighteen knows what's what, all right.

RICHARD. Now listen to me. I know exactly what you mean, and I am not surprised, either. I have had in mind the very comments you have just made. That is why I asked you to give your viewpoint. I have been thinking for some time that I made the characters rather idealistic.

CORDELIA. But the play couldn't have been better. Everyone went wild over it.

STEPHEN. [*Drily.*] That's all right. People like fairy tales, but no one believes they are true.

OSCAR. Well, it's a great play, anyway. You have certainly arrived, as a playwright, Rich. All you have to do now is to write a play. You needn't worry about the rest.

STEPHEN. You can't be too sure of that. Producers

are mighty fickle, just like audiences. It's one thing today, and another thing tomorrow.

OSCAR. Listen to the grouch.

MADELINE. Well, you can't depend on anything in this world, till you get it, and then you don't know how long you can keep it.

STEPHEN. How long does it take to get a play like that into shape, Rich?

RICHARD. Oh, I started that play—let me see—nearly two years ago. It took some time to get it in shape, before I had it published, and it took a longer time to find some one to produce it.

STEPHEN. How is the new one coming on?

AGNES. A new play? Oh, tell us about it!

RICHARD. There isn't much to say about it, because it's hardly begun. I have the idea all blocked out, but it's not going fast, at all. The characters don't seem to take hold.

STEPHEN. Don't take hold? I don't quite get that.

RICHARD. I mean the characters won't talk, that's all. I put them in position, start them out, and there they stand. [*They all smile.*] You needn't laugh. It's just as I say. The characters don't seem to have any initiative. I simply have to push them along. Now when things are going well, they take the lead, and talk so fast I can hardly keep up with them.

AGNES. I can write a play, too, if all I have to do is to take down what the characters say.

RICHARD. [*Smiling.*] Well, that's about all you need to do. But you know they change their minds, sometimes, and then their speeches have to be revised. They are like the rest of us. Only when we say something crude, we can't always revise it.

CORDELIA. Do you folks remember the New Year's celebration at Kruger's, just a year ago?

STEPHEN. I remember I had a beastly headache the next day.

MADELINE. I'll never forget that night.



AGNES. [*To RICHARD.*] That was when we first met you. We didn't know you would be famous so soon.

RICHARD. All the more kind of you to include me in your circle.

OSCAR. We know a good thing when we see it, Rich, even if it does look like a country preacher. I told Steve you'd be a live one, if you ever woke up. [*All laugh.*]

MADELINE. I'll never forget how the playwright looked, the first time I asked him for a cigarette.

CORDELIA. I can beat that. Once when I was thirsty, I asked Rich to get me a horse's neck, and he thought it was a meat order. [*All laugh loudly, RICHARD joining in.*]

RICHARD. I was some boob, sure enough.

OSCAR. Well, Rich, you are a regular fellow, now, anyway. You take your cognac like a gentleman, play a stiff hand of poker, and see the sights without blushing. Now for tonight. We've got a program that will give you a kick like a mule.

RICHARD. Count me in, before you go any further. What is it?

OSCAR. Well, when we finish dinner—

RICHARD. Dinner? It's after nine, now.

OSCAR. I know it is, but we're doing a stunt tonight that takes time. First, we went to a café for soup, and then to another, for another course, and so on. We're down to dessert, now, and one more place will finish it.

RICHARD. Well, what then?

CORDELIA. Then we are all going on a slumming tour, de luxe, the best ever.

STEPHEN. [*Pessimistically.*] We hope it will be good, still you never know how a thing will turn out. But it's been so beastly dull, we have to do something to get waked up.

CORDELIA. If it's like the last one, it will wake you up, all right. Now for my part. After the trip, you are all invited to my apartment for a chafing-dish supper, with some of the good old bonded stuff to wash it down,

and then a quiet little game. We'll give the old year a good send-off, and start the new one right.

OSCAR. Hurrah for Cordy!

MADELINE. Cordy, you're a peach.

AGNES. I told mother I would be home by twelve, sure. I didn't know it was to be an all-night spree.

MADELINE. Oh, you can fix it all right, if you try.

AGNES. I'll 'phone her that I'm going to the theatre with some friends, and will stay all night with one of the girls. I'll 'phone my friend, too, and put her wise, so as to be safe. Goodness! I forgot to bring a veil. Will I need one?

MADELINE. [*Emphatically.*] I should say you would. All ladies go veiled on such trips. I'll lend you one.

OSCAR. If it's as strong as our last trip, I'll take a veil, too. [*All laugh.*]

STEPHEN. [*Pessimistically.*] I'm always afraid of smallpox, or something like that, on these jaunts.

OSCAR. Oh, you are always taking the joy out of life. How do you get that way, Steve?

RICHARD. I'll have to do some planning, too. I promised Aunt Charlotte to breakfast with her in the morning, and then go to church with her.

OSCAR. Go to church? Good night!

MADELINE. Don't comment, Oscar, on a subject you know nothing about.

OSCAR. Oh, I know about going to church.

STEPHEN. Who's been telling you about it?

OSCAR. I'm serious. It's a great thing—if you are troubled with insomnia.

RICHARD. I'll send my aunt word that I can't come. I'm glad to have an excuse to get out of it. The poor old soul doesn't know how deadly dull it is in that house. I don't see how I stood it, when I lived there.

STEPHEN. [*Rising.*] Come on, girls. Come on, Oscar. You come and have coffee with us, Rich, and then we're off. [*They all rise. All but RICHARD move toward door, rear.*]

RICHARD. You go on, and finish your dinner, and call for me afterward. I want to get this play going, if possible. I'll expect you back, soon. Remember now, you're down to dessert. Don't start all over again. Glad you dropped in. Goodbye, all.

OSCAR. Hope you get a million-dollar idea, Rich, while we are gone. We'll be back in no time.

[*They all go out, rear, and there are cries of "Goodbye," "So long, Rich," and "Ta-ta," as they pass through the door. RICHARD returns to his seat, picks up a sheet of manuscript, and stares at it, takes up his pen, puts it down again, and leans back in his chair. He stretches his arms, yawns, puts his head back, starts up again, and again relaxes. He is soon asleep. The lights grow dim and dimmer, until the room is dark. Immediately, the room begins to grow light again. RICHARD is still sleeping. At his right and front, stand FIDELIA, EDWARD, ENID, ROLAND, and VICTORIA. All are in costume of medieval times. ROLAND is garbed like a knight; EDWARD, like a scholar; VICTORIA is in white; FIDELIA, in blue; ENID, in gray. All have a serious mien, and regard RICHARD sadly.*]

ROLAND. [*In a commanding tone.*] Wake up, Richard Hastings!

RICHARD. [*Springs up, startled. He puts his hand to his brow.*] You—you—oh! This is as I saw you last night!

ROLAND. Rouse yourself, Richard Hastings! You have been asleep too long.

RICHARD. [*Fervently.*] The play! You are the people of my play!

EDWARD. And we have come to say goodbye.

RICHARD. [*Puzzled.*] To say goodbye?

EDWARD. Yes, we are strangers to you now.

RICHARD. [*Still puzzled.*] Strangers?

EDWARD. Yes, that is why we are leaving you.

RICHARD. [*Smiling incredulously.*] But you cannot leave me. It is impossible. You are all characters in my play. You, Victoria, are my heroine.

VICTORIA. You called me Victoria, but names mean nothing. Truth is what I stood for in your play, and, as such, I leave you.

RICHARD. Why do you wish to go? [*He sits again.*]

VICTORIA. I do not wish to go. I have no choice. You have disowned me.

RICHARD. Why do you say I have disowned you?

VICTORIA. There is no home for me within your mind, and in the chambers of your heart deceit and subterfuge have taken my place.

RICHARD. Very well. If you go, I will create another character to take your place.

VICTORIA. You cannot create another to take my place.

RICHARD. Go, then, if you think that. [*To ROLAND.*] But you, Roland—you will not go.

ROLAND. I played the part of Courage, fearlessly. I was brave and true. I championed the weak, and fought craven foes. I braved every peril for right and justice. But I can serve you no longer.

RICHARD. Why should you not act for me again?

ROLAND. I cannot. There is no cause or purpose in your heart that calls me now. Where are my comrades, who once with me lived in your fancy?

RICHARD. Whom do you mean?

ROLAND. Where is high Honor? Where is calm Justice? Where is young Chivalry? They were the brave companions who tenanted your heart with me. Now they are gone, and in their places, like honored guests, Compromise and Complacency are found. These will serve you readily enough.

RICHARD. Compromise? Complacency? Are they such evils?

ROLAND. They dull the edge of every virtue, and welcome every vice.

RICHARD. How can you say I welcome every vice?

ROLAND. [*Severely.*] Look within, and find the answer. What are the things most welcome to your heart?

RICHARD. [*Rising, nettled.*] Go, then! I can replace you.

EDWARD. And I go, too. In your great play I took the part of Sacrifice. Never again, I fear, will you need me. I take my leave, sorrowfully.

RICHARD. You played your part so earnestly that I would have you play again. Why should you go?

EDWARD. You have lost my spirit. I cannot serve where I am unknown.

RICHARD. I know you well. You are Edward.

EDWARD. You know only my name. Listen. I was once among those held dear to you. You loved me, and in your life I was a living thing. You denied yourself, and gave yourself unsparingly to make something great and beautiful.

RICHARD. [*Enthused.*] Something great and beautiful! Yes, my play! Day and night I gave to it.

EDWARD. True, you labored hard, but I gave the victory. It was I who taught you "to scorn delights, and live laborious days."

RICHARD. [*Musing.*] To scorn delights, and live laborious days. Yes, I remember; but I tired of labor. I longed for the delights. I have had many pleasures.

EDWARD. Pleasures, yes, but not happiness. What have your pleasures brought you? Emptiness and weariness! Losing me, you lost your zest for work. You lost inspiration. Without me, you will win no victory, enjoy no happiness.

RICHARD. How can you bring happiness?

EDWARD. Because I answer every call of duty, and make its accomplishment a joy.

RICHARD. [*Subdued but anxious.*] No victory? No happiness?

ENID. As Modesty, I enhanced the charm and worth of all your women. I was the first to be repulsed, but I have lingered, hoping to be recalled to serve you. For

I would add myself to every woman. No daughter of the earth will ever wear a richer jewel. And I would move all men to true humility.

RICHARD. Then, Enid, you will stay, and grace my women.

ENID. But you are pleased with what is coarse and bold. You smile on ostentatious show and vanity. I cannot live in such an atmosphere. Your women make me blush to know there are such women. The noise and glamour of your life have frightened my companions.

RICHARD. Frightened them? How can that be? Who are your companions?

ENID. Simplicity, Gentleness, Quiet, and all who make for Peace and Sacredness.

RICHARD. [*Eagerly.*] And you will stay, if I summon these? Oh, tell me where to find them.

ENID. They live with Virtue, in the quiet places. They are as violets, fragrant, but unseen by him who reaches for the flaunting hollyhock.

RICHARD. Oh, do not leave me!

ENID. I would that I might stay. Sadly, I say farewell.

FIDELIA. I cannot stay longer with you, because you have denied me. I am Faith, known as Fidelia in your play. Once you walked by me. I was your shield, and through me you laid hold of things unseen. Then you believed in God, in God's children, and in all things good. But Doubt came to your mind, and you no longer saw God's hand and finger. No longer did you trust man's honor and woman's virtue. You banished my co-worker, Reverence, and scoffed at all things high and holy.

RICHARD. [*Agitated.*] I have not fallen so low. No, no! How can it be?

FIDELIA. Your ideals have fallen, and no one can reach beyond the ideal he strives for. You have lost the vision of noble achievement.

RICHARD. [*Vehemently.*] But I must achieve! I must! Give me the vision again!

FIDELIA. How can I? When I have tried to creep into your mind, I find all strange. And of the things so dear to me your heart is empty, swept and garnished.

RICHARD. Alas! The things I could not see, nor hear, grew dim and dimmer, till they vanished.

FIDELIA. But I had filled your soul with sweet and wondrous things that do not hit the senses. You doubted, then denied, and then the spirit world was closed forever to you.

RICHARD. Forever closed! [*Resolutely.*] No, no! You shall not go! You cannot. [*Takes a book from the table, and rapidly turns the pages.*] Look! here you are! Roland, Edward, Victoria, Fidelia, Enid. [*Clasps the book to his bosom, and speaks triumphantly.*] I have you all! You cannot leave! You are mine, for I created you.

VICTORIA. You summoned us to serve, but you did not create us. We are as old as Time, and we shall live until Time's book is closed, for we are deathless. You gave us names; but we have borne all names, and spoken every tongue the world has known. Whoever calls us, with prophetic mind, with clean, strong heart and reverent spirit, him will we serve in drama, song, and story. We will follow no other.

RICHARD. [*In desperation.*] Go, then, all of you! I do not need you. I can—I will call other helpers!

VICTORIA. But can you make a play with truth left out?

ROLAND. What worthy deeds will your heroes do, if they have not courage?

ENID. With every grace and charm, woman is like a thing deformed, if she lack modesty.

FIDELIA. He who has no faith shall have no vision of the future. [*RICHARD drops the book.*]

EDWARD. You must lose your life to find it. Only he who gives self can conquer.

RICHARD. [*Pleading.*] Oh, do not leave me! Be my friends, my comrades, dearer than all other friends!

Help me to fashion true, valiant men, and sweet, gentle women! Help me to create something strong and beautiful to give the world. Oh, say that you will stay! [*A pause. The people of the play make no sign. He raises his hands to heaven.*] Oh, help me, God, to put away all base, ignoble, mean things from my life. Take my little fame,—all else, and I will eat again the bitter bread of poverty and obscurity. But give me faith to follow truth, even to death,—courage to give self, humbly, to the uttermost. Help me, O God!

[*He sinks into his seat, and drops his head upon his outstretched arms. The players, with compassionate looks, gently extend their hands toward him. The lights grow dim and dimmer, until the room is dark. Immediately, it begins to grow light again. RICHARD is alone and asleep, leaning back in his chair. There is a loud knock at the rear door.*]

RICHARD. [*Starting up, cries excitedly.*] They will stay! Come! Come! [*Enter OSCAR, STEPHEN, CORDELIA, MADELINE, and AGNES.*] Where—oh! It is you! [*He stares at them, appearing surprised, and then disappointed.*]

STEPHEN. Well, here we are again, Rich.

RICHARD. [*Recovering himself, speaks calmly.*] Yes, I see you are.

OSCAR. Well, Rich, did you get any new thoughts while we were gone?

RICHARD. Yes.

MADELINE. Serious ones, too, I'll say.

CORDELIA. Let's get started, right away. Only two hours of the old year left, and I want you all at the apartment before midnight.

OSCAR. All set. Get your hat, Rich.

RICHARD. [*Gravely.*] I am going to ask you to excuse me. I don't feel that I can go.

[*The others look surprised.*]

OSCAR. What! Not going?



MADLINE. Oh, you must go.

STEPHEN. [*Dejectedly.*] I knew some beastly thing would happen.

CORDELIA. I know you are all tired out. But come with us, and get out in the air. You'll feel better, then.

RICHARD. It's not that. I am feeling perfectly well.

AGNES. You're going to work on that play. [*To the others.*] Didn't I say, if he got started once, he'd go on, writing all night?

RICHARD. I am not going to work on the play. I shall not write tonight.

CORDELIA. What's happened? Nothing serious, I hope.

RICHARD. I shall have friends with me tonight. [*He takes up the book.*]

MADLINE. Friends—visiting you, here?

RICHARD. Yes. They were in, just before you came.

STEPHEN. Well, well! They must have dropped in rather unexpectedly. Friends you haven't seen for some time, no doubt. Must be dear friends to sidetrack us.

RICHARD. Yes—dear friends they used to be. [*He clasps the book to his breast. Pause.*]

OSCAR. Do we know them? Have we seen them?

RICHARD. You have seen them, but you do not know them. [*Pause. They look strangely at RICHARD, and then at each other.*]

OSCAR. [*With an effort, getting up his courage.*] Tell us—who are these friends?

RICHARD. The people of my play.

[*They look at him incredulously, and at each other, mystified. They are about to speak, but something in his look checks them. The CURTAIN falls.*]



THE WISE MAN OF NINEVEH

AN ORIENTAL PLAY

## CHARACTERS

SENNACHERIB, *King of Assyria.*

AHIKAR, *the Wise, the king's counselor.*

ABUSMAK, *the king's chief captain.*

NADAN, *nephew and adopted son of Ahikar.*

SERABA, *wife of Ahikar.*

ZUMURAL, *daughter of the king.*

MENAR-SULA, *a dancing girl.*

A SOOTHSAYER.

A MESSENGER.

AN ATTENDANT.

A SPY.

SOLDIERS, SLAVES, MUSICIANS, ETC.

ACT I. SCENE 1. Court in front of Ahikar's house.

SCENE 2. The King's council hall.

ACT II. SCENE 1. Gardens of the palace.

SCENE 2. The King's council hall.

*An interval of nine days between Act I. and Act II.  
The action takes place at Nineveh, 700 B. C.*

# THE WISE MAN OF NINEVEH

AN ORIENTAL PLAY

ACT I.

SCENE I. *A court in front of AHIKAR'S house. Pillars on either side extend from the house into the foreground. In center, rear, is seen door to the house. The curtain rises, disclosing SERABA, seated on a bench, right, front, doing embroidery work. AHIKAR, left front, stands with bowed head, in sad meditation.*

SERABA. O Ahikar, my husband, thou art much cast down.

AHIKAR. [*Looking up.*] The days are heavy, and the nights bring evil dreams.

SERABA. Alas, what weighs upon thee?

AHIKAR. The wicked deeds of Nadan trouble me. He doth dissipate my property to its loss, and spareth not my servants and handmaids. He tormenteth my mules and cattle, and destroyeth the pick of the flock.

SERABA. No good thought dwelleth in him. He is like an evil blast that heraldeth the baneful storm.

AHIKAR. Alas, that this should be my sister's son!

SERABA. But thou hast made him as thine own son. Thou didst take him to thy house, when he was little.

Thou gavest him a gold chain for his neck, and like a king's son thou didst deck him out with ornaments. Thou hast clothed him in byssus and purple. Thou hast given him fine food, even milk and honey. Thou hast taught him thy precepts and maxims, yet hath he ever been mean and slothful.

AHIKAR. Thou knowest how this came to pass. No children came to us, despite our prayers and offerings to the gods. One day, when I gave sacrifice at Assur's temple, there came a voice from the flame, saying, "There is no seed ordained for thee, Ahikar. Take thou thy sister's son into thy house. Bring him up as thine own, and give him thy wisdom."

SERABA. Thou didst desire this message overmuch; thy longing for it brought it to thine ears.

AHIKAR. Shall men say, Lo, Ahikar dieth alive? Shall men say, Ahikar dieth, and leaveth no son to bury him, and no daughter to bewail him? Shall the people say, Ahikar's wisdom passeth, since no son taketh it from him?

SERABA. Thou didst desire too much. The gods have given thee long life, wealth, and great wisdom, and have made thee to stand at the right hand of the king. The people honor thee as the wisest man in Nineveh. Thou shouldst have been content. Thou dost teach others that discontent is ever a downward path.

AHIKAR. The king did say unto me, "O Ahikar, thou growest old, and who will advise in the affairs of the kingdom, when thou art gone?" And I said, "O King, the voice of the king is even as the voice of the gods. Nadan, my sister's son, will I take into my house, and him will I instruct in all wisdom, and he shall stand before thee, when I am gone." And the king said, "It is well."

SERABA. Thou knowest the saying: Rejoice not in the number of thy children, and in their lack be not distressed. But thou didst not regard this. Now art thou distressed, because of Nadan's evil ways.

AHIKAR. Yea, I am covered with grief and shame.

SEBABA. Thou hast warmed a serpent, which will surely sting thee.

AHIKAR. I will reprove him once again. I will rebuke his folly. Perchance I may light a candle of understanding in his heart. He may yet forsake his crooked path.

SERBAA. And he will despise thy words, and scatter them like chaff before the wind.

[*A pause. Enter ABUSMAK, left. He makes sign of greeting, by extending the hands, palms downward, and bending the body forward.*]

ABUSMAK. Greeting, father Ahikar, and greeting, good Seraba. To both the gods give health.

AHIKAR. And long life to thee, Abusmak, son of my comrade. Hast thou tidings? Have the spies returned from Egypt?

ABUSMAK. Nay, not yet. But evil tidings come from the south. The hosts of the Babylonians are stirred in rebellion, and the king is troubled.

AHIKAR. It is deep cause for trouble, for they are in multitude like the sands of the desert.

ABUSMAK. I fear not their multitude. Already have I given command that the satraps and captains assemble their cohorts in the Royal City. In ten days they shall start for Babylon.

AHIKAR. In action thou art the king's arm.

ABUSMAK. And in counsel thou the king's brain. Hast thou a plan, O wise Ahikar? For thy wisdom availeth more than chariots and the strength of horses.

AHIKAR. In that we have so many foes, and the course of Egypt is uncertain, we should make a covenant of friendship with some strong king.

ABUSMAK. Thou art ever wise, father Ahikar.

AHIKAR. The Median king doth desire a league of amity. If that were made, he would lend us help.

ABUSMAK. [*Earnestly.*] Do thou bring this before the king. My voice shall go for such a covenant. We

shall be stronger then to meet our enemies. But how can we gain the favor of the Median king?

AHIKAR. By offering the princess Zumural, to be his son's wife.

ABUSMAK. [*Starting back.*] Oh, never, never! This can never be!

AHIKAR. Why cannot this be done? Give reasons.

ABUSMAK. [*Fervently.*] O father Ahikar, it cannot be! It must not! I came to speak to thee of the princess Zumural—to beg thy counsel, but, till now, could not find words.

AHIKAR. Speak freely, son of my comrade.

ABUSMAK. I love the princess. I want her for my wife.

AHIKAR. Abusmak, thou art fallen before the strongest thing in the world. Wine is strong, but woman planteth the vineyard, whence the wine cometh. A king is strong, but all kings are born of woman. Man gathereth gold and silver and all goodly things, for the love of woman. Men have erred, sinned, and perished for women, and Zumural is one of these.

ABUSMAK. [*In fervid enthusiasm.*] She is the flower of the rose tree in the spring, as the frankincense branch in the summer, as lilies by the rivers of waters.

AHIKAR. Passion hath taken away thy prudence. What will the king say to this?

ABUSMAK. Oh, plead my cause before the king, father Ahikar. Am I not valiant and true? Have I not led the army well?

AHIKAR. Thou hast great honor for one so young. Thou art the king's chief captain. But the King's daughter is not for thee. Thou art mad. Thou must not look so high.

ABUSMAK. I am not mad, but I have dared to look at her, and I have dared to speak to her.

SERABA. [*Stopping her work.*] Entreat the king for him, Ahikar, my husband. Lift up thy voice in his cause. The king will listen to thee, knowing thy wisdom.



ABUSMAK. O good Seraba, the gods reward thee for thy words of cheer.

SERABA. I speak for thee, and likewise for the princess. A father giveth his daughter to whom he will, and she may never choose. It is an evil custom. Whether she be slave or princess, she is even as a slave, when given in marriage.

ABUSMAK. Good Seraba, thou art also very wise.

SERABA. A woman should love her husband, and a man should love his wife, as his own flesh. For she is himself, and his companion of his life, and by extreme labor she nurtureth his sons.

ABUSMAK. O good Seraba!

AHIKAR. I will help thee. I will raise up my voice, even in the presence of the king.

ABUSMAK. Good father Ahikar, thou wert my father's friend. Thou didst save his life, when he was falsely accused, and the king restored him to honor. I will ever look to heaven with mine eyes, remembering thy benefits, and I will seek the favor of the gods for thee.

AHIKAR. And I will kindle a fire on the altars of Belshim and Shamin. I will throw incense on the flame, make offerings, and seek an omen. Then will I go to the King.

ABUSMAK. [*Going left.*] Farewell, father Ahikar, and good Seraba. The gods lengthen your days. [*Goes out, left.*]

SERABA. Abusmak is strong and brave. The gods give him Zumural. Mayest thou persuade the king.

AHIKAR. My task is hard, and my striving may bring grief. Thou knowest the proverb: Do thou not bring about a betrothal, for they see the good to be from the gods and from luck; but the bad is traced to thee, and thou art despised.

SERABA, [*Looking left.*] Behold, Nadan cometh—he whom thou hast made as a son. [*Rising.*] It doth not please me to see him. [*Goes into house. Enter*

NADAN. *He is richly dressed. His expression is one of pride and arrogance.*

NADAN. Greeting, father Ahikar. The gods keep thee well.

AHIKAR. Greeting, my son.

NADAN. Father Ahikar, it doth grieve me to see that thou growest very old. Thy head is bowed, and thy beard is white. Thy limbs are feeble, and thy walk unsteady.

AHIKAR. Strength falleth from man at the winter of life, as the leaf falleth from the fig tree.

NADAN. The affairs of the kingdom are now a burden too heavy for thee. Thou shouldst abide in thy house for rest and meditation. Let me stand before the king, and counsel him in thy place. I have youth, and I am very strong.

AHIKAR. Son, boast not in the day of thy youth, lest thy youth be thy destruction.

NADAN. But thou hast taught me thy wisdom.

AHIKAR. Open thy heart to instruction in thy youth, and thou shalt find wisdom in thine old age. Thou must come to wisdom, as one that ploweth and planteth, and waiteth for the good fruits.

NADAN. Thy powers fail thee, father Ahikar. Men say that thy mind is distraught, and thy thoughts deficient. Thou shouldst yield thy place, before thou art compelled to give way in dishonor.

AHIKAR. Son, thy mouth speaketh reverence, but thy heart goeth after covetousness. Avarice is the mother of all evils, and discontent leadeth to destruction.

NADAN. [*Nettled.*] Didst thou not so rear me and teach me, that I should be counselor in thy place?

AHIKAR. Yea, when thou lovest honor, and honorest wisdom.

NADAN. [*Arrogantly.*] Hast thou aught else to urge against me?

AHIKAR. Verily, I have. Thou hast of late grown insolent. Thou hast wasted my chattels. Thou hast

abused my servants, and I have heard their weeping and groaning. Why hast thou given the slave, Roguel, a wound on the head?

NADAN. He moved not quickly, when I spake.

AHIKAR. He that showeth no mercy shall not escape the rod. Nadan, thou art contentious, vain, and covetous. Yet will I bear with thee awhile, but if thou mend not thy ways, I shall make report of thee to the king, and I shall disown thee as my son.

NADAN. [*Sullenly.*] I hear thee. Thou dost chide continually.

AHIKAR. Because thou dost continually offend. I go now to make offerings to Belshim and Shamin, for men must reverence the gods. I leave these precepts with thee: be humble, talk little, be modest in all things. Farewell. [*He goes out right. NADAN walks about, in evident anger. After a moment, MENAR-SULA enters, left. She looks apprehensively about her.*]

MENAR-SULA. Nadan, dear Nadan!

NADAN. [*Surprised, turning toward her.*] Menar-Sula! What meaneth this?

MENAR-SULA. O Nadan, thou didst not come to me, according to thy word, and I longed to see thee.

NADAN. [*Vexed.*] Have I not told thee thou must not follow me about? It is unseemly.

MENAR-SULA. [*Reproachfully.*] Four moons have not yet gone, since thou didst avow thy love, and thy feet were swift to bring thee to my side.

NADAN. Now am I much busied with affairs. I must learn the art of writing, the answering of dispatches, the flight of birds, and divination.

MENAR-SULA. Thou couldst come at nightfall.

NADAN. At nightfall I light the altar fires, and make offerings to the gods.

MENAR-SULA. [*Angrily.*] Thou hast time for other maidens! Nelida hath seen thee.

NADAN. [*Sternly.*] Nelida shall be whipped for speaking lies.

MENAR-SULA. Oh, no! Let her not be beaten for my hasty words. I will believe thee. But say again, thou lovest me.

NADAN. In truth, I do.

MENAR-SULA. Nadan, my heart's desire, when wilt thou take me as thy wife?

NADAN. Thou must not think of that.

MENAR-SULA. [*Insistently.*] Thou didst promise, thou didst promise!

NADAN. But then it had not been decreed that I should stand before the king, and be chief scribe and counselor, in place of father Ahikar. The king would not suffer me to take a slave to wife.

MENAR-SULA. [*Proudly.*] My father gave no tribute to any king. He was a Bedouin chief. I am nobly born.

NADAN. But here thou art a slave.

MENAR-SULA. [*Fiercely.*] Nadan, cast me not aside! My blood is fierce and wild, as are the desert horses. Make me not desperate!

NADAN. [*In conciliatory tone.*] I love thee, truly. But thou must be more discreet. [*Looking about.*] Someone might see thee.

MENAR-SULA. [*Pleadingly.*] O take me as thy wife!

NADAN. I cannot. Thou art not free.

MENAR-SULA. Then take me as thy slave—thine only slave, and keep me forever.

NADAN. That will I do.

MENAR-SULA. [*Kneels before him, and clasps his knees.*] O Nadan, I love thee!

NADAN. [*Raising her up.*] Good Sula, rise. I will do much to make thee happy. [*He pauses a moment in thought.*] Ten moons have gone, since thou camest from Arabia. Dost thou not long to see thy native land?

MENAR-SULA. Thou hast made me forget it.

NADAN. But thy father and mother and brethren?

MENAR-SULA. Thou art more to me than my kindred.

NADAN. [*Walks slowly from her in thought, pauses*

*a moment, and then turns toward her.]* Dost thou love me enough to do something I shall require of thee?

MENAR-SULA. Thou knowest I do.

NADAN. Wilt thou give a letter to the king?

MENAR-SULA. [*In surprise.*] To the King?

NADAN. Yea, hast thou courage to do it?

MENAR-SULA. Dost thou mean today, when I dance before him?

NADAN. Yea, today, after the dance is done. I will instruct thee what to do and what words to say. Canst thou—wilt thou do this thing for me?

MENAR-SULA. I can and will do anything for thee.

NADAN. [*Puts his hands on her cheeks, and kisses her forehead.*] Go now, good Sula, before thou art seen. I will come to thee very soon. Now thou must hasten. Farewell.

MENAR-SULA. [*Goes left, then turns.*] Farewell, Nadan, my life. [*She goes out left. NADAN goes, right. As they pass out, the curtain falls.*]

SCENE 2. *The same day. THE KING's council hall. At the left, THE KING is seated on a raised throne. At his right, stand ABUSMAK, NADAN, ZUMURAL, and SERABA. At his left, and rear, stand soldiers, slaves, etc. Two slaves stir the air over THE KING with long-handled fans. A moment after the curtain rises, MENAR-SULA and two players on stringed instruments enter from right, and prostrate themselves before THE KING. THE KING stretches out his hand, and they rise. The musicians take their stand, rear, center, and play, and MENAR-SULA dances. Music and dance are oriental. After the dance is done, dancer and players prostrate themselves again before THE KING. Again he stretches out his hand, and they arise and retire right, keeping their faces toward THE KING.*

THE KING. Music is pleasant to the ear, and a maid, dancing, delighteth the eye. Yet am I tired of it. Naught pleaseth me today. Time crawleth slowly on, burdened with cares. [*To ABUSMAK.*] Have the spies returned from Egypt?

ABUSMAK. My lord and king, not yet.

THE KING. Mayhap the Egyptians knew them to be spies, and hold them now as captives, lest they tell us of preparation for war against us.

ABUSMAK. My lord, I think not so. They are clever men and cunning, and so garbed as to belie their mission. Time, indeed, hath gone to make the journey, but they would linger, getting report to our advantage.

NADAN. My lord and king, if we but send a hundred talents of gold, and a thousand men for making bricks, the Egyptian king will be our friend.

ABUSMAK. It were better that ten thousand die in battle, than that a thousand die as slaves.

THE KING. We must weigh reasons, and follow the best counsel. Where is the wise Ahikar?

NADAN. He is at the temple of Belshim and Shamin.  
[Pause. Sound of a trumpet outside, right. All listen. It sounds again.]

ABUSMAK. [Excitedly.] O King, the trumpet soundeth the signal, which doth proclaim the spies have come from Egypt. [Enter from right one of the spies. He prostrates himself before the king.]

THE SPY. I bow on my face, at the feet of the king.

THE KING. Rise and speak.

THE SPY. [Rising.] At thy command, O King, we went to Egypt, my fellows and myself, and stayed there many days. Some told us war was planned, but none knew in what quarter.

THE KING. Didst learn aught of their numbers?

THE SPY. We spied among their ranks, and found as follows: of bowmen there are one hundred and forty thousand; of slingers, two hundred and twelve thousand; of war chariots, a thousand; of lancers with shields, we learned not the number; of tents and baggage carts, many. In all, their hosts are as grasshoppers for multitude.

THE KING. Learned ye aught else?

THE SPY. Their king is much troubled, and their priests are anxious and perplexed.

THE KING. Didst thou learn the cause of this?

THE SPY. One of our number, garbed as a seer, talked with their priests, and learned this much: their king had planned a mighty work, but some god gave forth an oracle, which must be made clear before the work go on. No one in Egypt can expound the saying. Therefore, are their priests and wise men much distraught.

THE KING. [Musing.] A king may crush the man that vexeth him, but the gods will not be stayed. [To

THE SPY.] Hast thou other matter for mine ear?

THE SPY. Naught else of import.

THE KING. Thou mayest go. There will be gold and presents for thee and thy comrades.

THE SPY. O king, live forever! [*He withdraws, right, keeping his face toward THE KING.*]

THE KING. [*To ABUSMAK.*] Dost thou believe the Egyptians will war against us?

ABUSMAK. If they come, O king, their bodies will rest forever on the plain, outside the Royal City.

[*Enter MENAR-SULA, quickly, from right. She advances to THE KING, and prostrates herself.*]

MENAR-SULA. I am thy slave and the dust of thy feet.

THE KING. Rise and speak.

MENAR-SULA. [*Rising.*] O king, I found this writing in the way, and have brought it to my lord and king. [*Gives him a piece of parchment.*]

THE KING. [*Handing it to ABUSMAK.*] Read.

ABUSMAK. [*Reading.*] "Ahikar, counselor to Sennacherib, king of Assyria, to Merodach-baladan, King of Babylon. All hail. When this writing reacheth thee, thou shalt muster thy forces, and come to the Plain of the Eagles, on the fourteenth day of the month Sivan, and I will put in thy power the land of the Assyrians, and will give the throne of Sennacherib into thy hand." [*All start in great surprise.*]

THE KING. [*Rising.*] Ahikar hath written this! Let mine eyes behold it.

ABUSMAK. [*Handing the parchment to THE KING.*] Surely, this came not from Ahikar's hand!

THE KING. Is not this Ahikar's seal? Look, Nadan. [*Hands parchment to NADAN.*]

NADAN. Truly, it is his seal, and the writing is his. [*Hands parchment back to THE KING.*]

THE KING. [*Falling back on his throne.*] Ahikar, my counselor, would betray me! Abusmak, straightway bring him before me.

ABUSMAK. I obey the king. [*Goes out right, keeping his face to THE KING.*]



THE KING. [*To MENAR-SULA.*] Tell me, girl, again, where didst thou find this writing?

MENAR-SULA. I saw one gallop swiftly toward the western gate. This letter fell from his hand. I took it up, and brought it to the king.

THE KING. Thou hast done well. Thou shalt have ten shekels of silver, and a cloak of byssus. Thou mayest go.

MENAR-SULA. May the king live forever. [*She goes out, right, keeping her face toward THE KING.*]

THE KING. Ahikar false! Whom can I trust?

SERABA. O king, Ahikar hath not done this thing, nor hath he ever contrived evil against thee.

THE KING. His writing and his seal condemn him.

NADAN. Perchance, O king, he will interpret the writing for good, not evil. Behold, he cometh. [*Enter ABUSMAK and AHIKAR, right. Both salute THE KING.*]

AHIKAR. The gods give thee long life, O king.

THE KING. [*Sternly.*] Ahikar, I did trust thee. I put thee in a high place, and did listen to thy counsel, and from my throne thou wouldst now hurl me to ruin. Thou wouldst betray me into the hand of Merodach-baladan of Babylon.

AHIKAR. Who bringeth such a charge against me, O my lord and king?

THE KING. [*Handing him the parchment.*] Read what thy hand hath written.

AHIKAR. [*Reads the parchment.*] O King, I have not contrived this message, nor put my hand to it. Some enemy hath done it.

THE KING. [*Coldly.*] Doth it not bear thy seal?

AHIKAR. Alas, it doth.

THE KING. The hand writing is thy very own.

AHIKAR. It doth resemble mine, yet have I not formed the characters.

THE KING. [*In stern anger.*] Abusmak, lead away the faithless and godless Ahikar. Take him to the Desolate Field, and have him slain, and remove his head

one hundred ells from his body. [*The others, except NADAN, look aghast.*]

SERABA. [*Pleading.*] O King, live forever. Spare Ahikar, for he hath not sinned against thee. Rather doth he meditate, day and night, how best to serve thee. He is a priest of Assur. Wilt thou offend the gods?

THE KING. [*Haughtily.*] The king is mightier than the gods.

ABUSMAK. O king, judge not Ahikar on this piece of writing found by chance, for surely some deceit is hidden in it. Thy father, great King Sargon, loved and trusted him. His wisdom made Assyria great. By his wise counsel were the Hittites and the Philistines subdued, Samaria was overthrown, and the tribes of Israel taken in captivity.

THE KING. Now would he overthrow Nineveh, and make us slaves to Babylon.

ZUMURAL. Father, my lord and king, the wise Ahikar doth not merit death. This thing is not from him, for he is good, even as he is wise. The grapevine doth not send out thorns, nor doth the fig tree give forth thistles. How, then, can Ahikar do an evil thing?

THE KING. Thou knowest not the wickedness of men's hearts.

NADAN. Ahikar is inane and weak. The burden of the counselor hath been too great for his old age, for he is near the grave. He wot not what he wrote. Banish him from Assyria, and let him die of sickness.

THE KING. The unfaithful man must die today.

AHIKAR. O king, thou hast willed me to death, and wilt not hear me. But I am innocent, and there is no deceit in my heart. My life hath been open. Long did I serve great Sargon, thy father. Long have I served thee. Long have I stood in the House of the Great Mountain of the Lands. Now thou wilt send me down to silence, gloom, and dust. But have pity on thy servant. Since I must die, command that I be slain within my house, and my body given over to burial.

THE KING. [*Rising.*] Let him be slain within his house, and his body given burial. Two witnesses shall bring me word thereof. Thus endeth it. So perish all unfaithful to the king. The king hath spoken. [*The curtain falls.*]

## ACT II.

## NINE DAYS LATER

SCENE I. *The gardens of THE KING's palace. It is moonlight. There are flower beds, with walks between, and a fountain in the rear. There is a bench, front, center. The curtain rises, disclosing ABUSMAK, standing near bench, and looking expectantly toward left entrance of garden. After a moment, ZUMURAL enters from left. She goes up to him, and gives him her hands.*

ABUSMAK. Zumural, thou hast come at last!

ZUMURAL. Have I come late, good Abusmak?

ABUSMAK. I came too soon. I could not wait. Nine days have gone, since I have seen thee. To a waiting heart how slow the time! Now it will run as in a happy dream. With thee how have the hours gone, sweet Zumural?

ZUMURAL. I burden the air with my sighs. I moan like a dove, night and day.

ABUSMAK. [*Looking around.*] Are we secure from spying eyes?

ZUMURAL. My father and myself alone come here, and he taketh his rest now. Pray sit beside me, here. [*They sit together on the bench.*] Now tell me all.

ABUSMAK. I have not yet spoken to the king, thy father. I thought it well to let his anger cool, which burned so hot against Ahikar.

ZUMURAL. Alas! I mourn for good Ahikar. And thou hast lost a friend.

ABUSMAK. And gained an enemy. Nadan is coun-

selor now. Flattery hath gained for him the king's ear, and he doth work against me. He doth ever counsel peace to misprise my office. Therefore do I wait for a favorable hour to plead my cause.

ZUMURAL. O Abusmak, what hath fate in store for us?

ABUSMAK. Who knoweth what the future hath of good or evil? Who is there that can grasp the will of the immortal gods? But time breaketh all seals. Tomorrow may be big with portent.

ZUMURAL. And why tomorrow?

ABUSMAK. A messenger from Egypt hath come to Nineveh. Tomorrow he will appear before the king. Tomorrow we shall know if it be peace or war with Egypt.

ZUMURAL. How can peace or war touch our desires?

ABUSMAK. If it be war, I will bide my time, until the day of battle. Then will I ask the King for thee, for in the day of battle I shall be greater than the King.

ZUMURAL. Oh, may the Egyptians come, if thou be not hurt.

ABUSMAK. A captain is not great, except in war. Then all look to him for safety, king and slave alike.

ZUMURAL. I would I were a slave! Then thou couldst take me.

ABUSMAK. Wert thou a slave, I would take thee as mine own, and thou shouldst be the master—I the slave.

ZUMURAL. O dear Abusmak!

ABUSMAK. If all else fail, there is still one path that we may take together.

ZUMURAL. Whither doth it lead, Abusmak?

ABUSMAK. It leadeth from the court, far from Nineveh.

ZUMURAL. I will take that path with thee.

ABUSMAK. Consider well. Thou art a king's daughter. Thou hast soft raiment and dainty viands. Thou art perfumed with sweet storax and galbanum. But endive and gall are not more bitter than poverty.

ZUMURAL. I have no fear of the future.

ABUSMAK. The good things of earth are for those who live in kings' houses. The lot of the exile is hard.

ZUMURAL. I can meet hardships and trials, and find joy in sharing them with thee. Separation I cannot endure.

ABUSMAK. O Zumural, thy voice and thy beauty, like unmixed wine, overmaster me. My blood runs riot, and I must leave thee, ere I forget all else; and I must speak with the captains yet tonight. [*Both rise and move toward right.*]

ZUMURAL. Farewell, good Abusmak.

ABUSMAK. Farewell, sweet Zumural. The gods keep thee. [*He kisses her hands, and then kisses her forehead. Then he goes off, right. She stands a moment, looking after him, and then returns to the seat, and sits.* MENAR-SULA comes in, timidly, from left. ZUMURAL sees her, and rises. MENAR-SULA halts, as though doubtful of her course.]

ZUMURAL. [*Reprovingly.*] Dost thou venture to come into the king's gardens?

MENAR-SULA. [*Running to ZUMURAL, and kneeling before her.*] O princess Zumural, pardon! Pardon thy handmaiden for coming here. But I am in distress.

ZUMURAL. Art thou not Menar-Sula, the Arabian dancing girl?

MENAR-SULA. I am, O princess, and the unhappiest slave in Nineveh.

ZUMURAL. [*Kindly.*] Rise, Menar-Sula, and tell me all. I will be kind to thee.

MENAR-SULA. [*Rising.*] O princess, the gods be kind to thee. I am a slave, and I wish to be free. The hope hath come to me that thou mightest help me, if I could plead with thee, and tell thee my unhappy state.

ZUMURAL. Why art thou unhappy? Thou art fed and clothed. Thou hast no cares. If thou wert free, how wouldst thou get bread, in a land where thou art strange?

MENAR-SULA. [*Confidently.*] I should be well cared for, were I but free.

ZUMURAL. Foolish girl! Thou knowest naught of this great city of wickedness and lies. Thou wouldst be as a bird before the fowler. Now thou art as a bird hid in the cedar.

MENAR-SULA. [*Eagerly.*] O princess, hear me further. A youth of thy nation loveth me, and will take me as his wife, when I am free.

ZUMURAL. A youth of Nineveh loveth thee? [ZUMURAL *resumes her seat.*]

MENAR-SULA. Yea, princess.

ZUMURAL. [*Gently.*] And dost thou love him?

MENAR-SULA. More than all else in life. To honor him I would I were a princess.

ZUMURAL. [*Thoughtfully.*] And if thou wert a princess, and he low born, wouldst give up all to share his lot?

MENAR-SULA. Gladly, princess. Dost thou not understand?

ZUMURAL. I understand. Princess and slave are one at heart, and both are slaves to passion.

MENAR-SULA. [*Pleading.*] O princess, wilt thou help me?

ZUMURAL. But, Menar-Sula, dost thou not know a man may wed a slave, if he so desire?

MENAR-SULA. He is of exalted rank.

ZUMURAL. Of exalted rank? What is his station?

MENAR-SULA. [*Proudly.*] He is great. None standeth higher. He doth serve the king.

ZUMURAL. Who is this youth? Tell me, Menar-Sula. I will keep thy secret.

MENAR-SULA. He is Nadan, the king's counselor.

ZUMURAL. [*Rising in surprise.*] Nadan! Hath Nadan promised to take thee as his wife?

MENAR-SULA. He hath said it, he hath promised.

ZUMURAL. [*To herself.*] How doth the heart lend the mind hope! [*Pause.*] But I will help thee. I will

plead for thee before the king, tomorrow. His words will set thee free.

MENAR-SULA. [*Clasping her hands in emotion.*] To be free—free, tomorrow! Oh! princess!

ZUMURAL. [*Sympathetically.*] Good Menar-Sula, thou shalt hear the words that make thee free. Thou mayest stand close by the door, and hear me plead, and hear the king consent. Tomorrow thou art free.

MENAR-SULA. [*Kneels and kisses ZUMURAL's hands.*] O gracious princess, after I am free, love still enslaveth me, else would I be thy slave. The gods make thee happy, as they have made thee beautiful. The gods give thee all thy heart's desire. [THE CURTAIN FALLS.]



SCENE 2. *The next morning. Scene and characters the same as in Act I, Scene 2, but the persons on the king's right are in this order: NADAN, ZUMURAL, ABUSMAK, SERABA.*

THE KING. Speak, Nadan, my counselor, what business waiteth for us?

NADAN. My lord and king, a courier hath come from Egypt, bearing a message from the Egyptian king, and he will soon stand before thee.

THE KING. It is well. We shall weigh the message, before we give reply. Dost thou know aught thereof?

NADAN. I know not, my king, if it mean peace or war.

THE KING. What tidings from Babylon, Abusmak?

ABUSMAK. The rebellious princes still defy thine authority, and now seek to incite the Arabians against us. Last night we started out a mighty force for Babylon, under a strong leader. We shall soon scatter the rebels.

THE KING. Why are the warlike tribes of Media stirred?

ABUSMAK. They meditate no evil against us. Their strife is elsewhere.

NADAN. Beloved of Assur, the omens are uncertain, and the heavens are troubled. The moon, at setting, had the color of a dust cloud, filling the crescent. It is an evil sign. Make peace with thine enemies, O king.

ABUSMAK. Shall we fear the Arabian dogs, or the black-headed people of the Euphrates? Is not Assyria great? Is not our lord most powerful? We shall crush the rebels like straws, and strike them with the plagues of the four elements.

THE KING. Why do our people hide in their houses, and why do caravans, by night and day, leave the Royal City?

ABUSMAK. Some are afraid, O king, and Ahikar's fate hath saddened them.

SERABA. He was a father to them all. They trusted in his wisdom. Now they know it is gone.

THE KING. Peace, Seraba. The life of day before yesterday hath departed today.

NADAN. Let men be told that I have Ahikar's wisdom. [*Sound of a trumpet, right.*]

NADAN. O king, the messenger from Egypt cometh now. [*Pause. Enter MESSENGER. He advances to THE KING, and makes profound obeisance, bending low his body, and extending hands, palms downward.*]

THE MESSENGER. Seven times and seven times do I, the royal messenger, bow before the king of Assyria.

KING. Speak, O royal messenger, I incline mine ear to hear thee.

THE MESSENGER. [*Taking scroll from his girdle, reads.*] Shabaka, Pharaoh of Egypt, King of Ethiopia, lord of the Nile, beloved of Osiris and Isis, to Sennacherib, King of Assyria, greeting. Health to your lordship and kingship. Be it known to thee that I will build a great palace, reaching from earth to heaven. Thou shalt send me the wisest man in Assyria to direct the building thereof. No one may direct this work, save only he who can interpret the oracle of Osiris, and no one in Egypt can do this. Send me such a man, and to him will I give great honor and much treasure, and I will be thy friend. If thou fail, I shall destroy thy country, and take thy throne.

THE KING. What is this saying that the wisdom of Egypt cannot solve?

THE MESSENGER. This is the saying: [*Reads.*] Behold, a great pillar. On the pillar are twelve cedars. On each cedar are thirty wheels. On each wheel are two couriers, one white and one black, and the whole is the most precious thing in life.

THE KING. Messenger of King Shabaka, thou art welcome to the Royal City. Come before me in three days, and get thine answer. Meanwhile thou shalt be well fed and sheltered. Thou mayest go. Nadan, re-

ceive the message. [NADAN takes the scroll, and THE MESSENGER retires, right, keeping his face toward THE KING.]

THE KING. Ye have heard the message from Egypt. How doth it move you?

NADAN. We have many enemies, O king. The greatness of thy glory doth provoke them. We should make peace with the Egyptians, for they bear cruel weapons, without fear of the fight.

ABUSMAK. If they see us tremble, they will think us slaves. Thou hast, O king, ever triumphed over thy foes. Hast thou not scattered the Elamites? Hast thou not shut up King Hezekiah of Judah, like a bird in a cage? Our people are strong and well fed, and thy splendor covereth the land like a garment.

THE KING. Yea, it is even so.

ABUSMAK. Though we fear not Egypt's threat, it will be well to send the Egyptian king the meaning of the saying. He shall fear our wisdom, as he feareth our armies.

THE KING. But who can solve this riddle?

ABUSMAK. Let Nadan, the counselor, answer. Hath he not Ahikar's wisdom?

NADAN. Great king, the gods themselves cannot give answer to the saying. It is but folly. Twelve cedars cannot stand on a pillar. The Egyptian king doth mock us.

SERABA. O king, thou needest now, indeed, the wisdom of Ahikar.

THE KING. [*Anxiously.*] If the Egyptians join our foes, how can we meet so great a multitude? We must have peace with Egypt. But who can expound the saying?

ABUSMAK. O king, there is an aged soothsayer in my house, who sought shelter with me. He hath the wisdom of the east and west. The gods have favored him, and taught him to interpret dreams and omens. Never have I listened to a wiser man. Command that he come before thee, that he may expound this saying.

THE KING. Go, Abusmak. Bring this soothsayer before me.

[ABUSMAK goes out right, keeping his face to THE KING.]

NADAN. No seer can make fitting answer to the saying. It is but a deceit to trouble us.

THE KING. The key that shall unlock its meaning will open a door for peace with Egypt.

ZUMURAL. O king, my lord and father, hear me. I seek a boon of thee. Make Menar-Sula free. She is the Arabian dancing girl, and she doth please me much. I would have her with me. [MENAR-SULA's face is seen at curtained door, rear.]

THE KING. I will command that she attend thee.

ZUMURAL. Not as a slave, my father. Let her be free to choose.

NADAN. O king, hear thy counselor. I have devised a plan to gain the friendship of the Egyptians. Let us send gold and ivory to their king, and let us send the Arabian dancing girl to please his eye. Therefore, do not set her free, but send her as a present to the Egyptian king.

ZUMURAL. [Pleading.] Oh, send her not to Egypt. Make her free.

NADAN. If freed, she would return at once to her native land. The Arabian king would think thou didst despise his gift, and his anger would be stirred against us. [MENAR-SULA disappears.]

THE KING. I fain would please thee, daughter. I will ponder this, and give answer at another time. No more today. Abusmak cometh now, leading the aged seer, and he now hath our thought. [Enter ABUSMAK and THE SOOTHSAYER. The latter, covered by a cloak from head to foot, kneels before THE KING.]

THE SOOTHSAYER. O mighty king, I bow before thee. May health of body and joy of heart be thy daily portion.

THE KING. Rise, O seer, and know why I have sent for thee. Canst thou explain oracles?

THE SOOTHSAYER. [*Rises.*] With the help of the gods, O king.

THE KING. The gods lend thee aid. If thou canst rightly interpret this saying, thou mayest ask anything of me, and I will give it. Do thou, O Nadan, read the saying.

NADAN. [*Reading.*] Behold, a great pillar. On the pillar are twelve cedars. On each cedar are thirty wheels. On each wheel are two couriers, one white and one black, and the whole is the most precious thing in life.

THE SOOTHSAYER. [*Puts both hands to his head, and stands a moment in thought.*] The meaning is plain, O king. The pillar is the year. The twelve cedars are the months of the year. The thirty wheels are the days of the month. The couriers, one white and one black, are dawn and nightfall, and time is the most precious thing in life.

THE KING. [*In wonder and admiration.*] Oh, thou art wondrous wise!

NADAN. He hath the wisdom of the gods!

THE KING. Thou art mighty in wisdom. This is, indeed, the truth. I have known none so wise as thou. I would have thy counsel ever as a guide. Thou art even wiser than Ahikar.

THE SOOTHSAYER. [*Throwing off his cloak, reveals himself as AHIKAR.*] Behold, O king, I am Ahikar! [*All but ABUSMAK and SERABA start in amazement.*]

THE KING. [*Shrinking back in fear.*] Ahikar! Hast thou come back from the gloom and dust of the underworld?

ABUSMAK. O king, let me speak. As I led Ahikar forth, ten days ago, we passed great Assur's temple. A cloud of smoke came from the altar, and from the smoke a voice, saying: "Slay not Ahikar, the Wise." Dismayed, I cried: "How can I serve the King, and reverence the gods?" Again the voice: "Spare wise Ahikar yet ten days, for then the King shall sorely need his wisdom."

And so I hid him in my house, and good Seraba brought him bread and wine—

NADAN. [*Triumphantly.*] Now thou knowest, O king, that Abusmak hath not been faithful to thee.

THE KING. Nadan, be still. I will hear all.

ABUSMAK. And now the prophecy hath come to pass. Pardon thy servants who have done this thing.

THE KING. The gods are mightier than the king. Yet how did witnesses bring me word thereof?

ABUSMAK. By drinking unmixed wine, their brains were fuddled, and their senses dulled. A slave condemned to death for shedding blood, they saw, and took him for Ahikar.

THE KING. All are pardoned who have known of this. And, good father Ahikar, pardon me, thy king, for I have listened to evil report against thee. He who hath wronged thee, by false words, shall die.

MENAR-SULA. [*Rushing in right, speaks excitedly.*] Thou shalt know the truth, O King! The message that I brought I found not in the way. No horseman dropped it. [NADAN goes quickly out, left.]

THE KING. [*Sternly.*] Why hast thou deceived the king?

MENAR-SULA. I did it for Nadan.

THE KING. For Nadan!

MENAR-SULA. Yea, he put the message in my hand. He put the words in my mouth. [*Desperately.*] Kill me if thou wilt! I care not!

ZUMURAL. [*Pityingly.*] Menar-Sula! O king, my father, pardon her. She hath made amends.

THE KING. Go, girl, in safety. [*She runs out left.*] Let Nadan stand before me. Where is Nadan?

ABUSMAK. He hath gone from sight, my lord.

THE KING. He cannot escape. Hear ye all: Ahikar is counselor again. Let heralds proclaim in all the streets that Ahikar liveth, and hath greater honor than before. And now, noble father Ahikar, ask what thou wilt. It shall be given thee, according to my word.

AHIKAR. For myself I ask naught, O king. But for Abusmak, son of my comrade, I ask this, give him the princess Zumural to wife.

ABUSMAK. O blessed father Ahikar!

THE KING. It shall be so. The thread of wool shall bind her hand to his, while great Ishtar is invoked to bless the union. [ABUSMAK *takes ZUMURAL's hand, and puts his arm around her.*] Abusmak is brave and virtuous. He shall bear my signet, and all shall bow before him. Only on the throne shall I be greater.

AN ATTENDANT. [*Rushes in, left, and prostrates himself before THE KING.*] Lo, I am the footstool at the feet of my king.

THE KING. Rise and speak.

ATTENDANT. [*Rising.*] Nadan lies at the palace gate, a girdle dagger in his heart.

ZUMURAL. Menar-Sula!

ABUSMAK. He durst not stand in the flame of thy wrath, O king. He hath slain himself.

THE KING. It is better so.

AHIKAR. He who diggeth a pit shall fall therein. Out of evil cometh evil, and a troubled heart.

THE KING. O wise Ahikar, how can man find the good, and be at peace?

AHIKAR. While man striveth, let him ever know that the best gifts come from a higher power. Therefore, let him eat his bread and salt in gratitude, and be content.

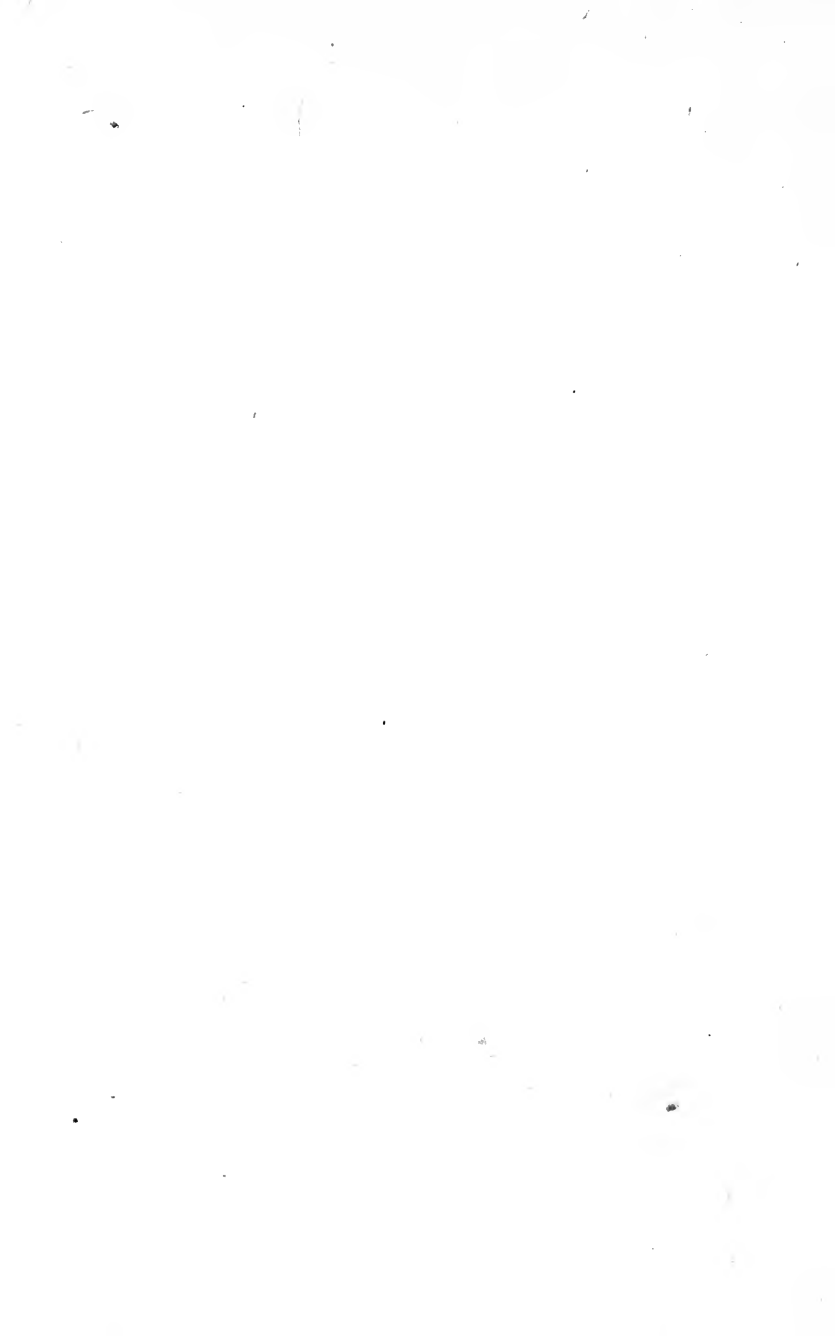
[THE CURTAIN FALLS.]















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